THE MINUTE BOYS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

JAMES OTIS

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THE MINUTE BOYS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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"'I WILL TAKE YOUR LIFE AS FORFEIT FOR TREACHERY!'"

(*See page 281.*)

THE MINUTE BOYS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

A STORY OF "HOW WE BOYS AIDED MARION THE SWAMP FOX"

AS TOLD BY

RUFUS RANDOLPH

JAMES OTIS Kaler

Illustrated by

J. W. F. KENNEDY

BOSTON

DANA ESTES & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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FOREWORD

It has always seemed proper to me that he who writes a story should explain to the readers how it came about that he was prompted to tell the tale, for surely there must be a good and sufficient reason for the making of a book, and it also comes to my mind that however dry and uninteresting such an explanation may be, he who reads the story owes it to himself, as well as the author, to learn all he can regarding the facts, however remote, which may pertain to the characters presented, and yet be of such a nature that the author cannot well, without sacrificing his own plans, deviate sufficiently to relate them in the book itself.

Therefore it is that I shall be grateful to the reader if he will set down in his own mind certain passages from history which are quoted below, to the end that he may the better understand why two lads born and bred in Charleston, in the State of South Carolina, left their homes at a time when the cause of liberty appeared to be crushed to earth, and why they followed the desperate ventures of

Francis Marion during his unequal but wondrously successful struggle against an enemy which was bent on trampling into the mire the patriots who strove to rear a country for themselves in the New World.

Shortly after the publication of the story entitled "The Minute Boys of the Mohawk Valley," a gentleman residing at Charleston sent to me a packet of closely written pages, stained by time, and with the ink so faded that only with difficulty certain portions could be read. I was richly rewarded, however, for the labor spent in reading that which was set down, for I found that the manuscript was neither more nor less than a series of letters connected, evidently at a later date, by memoranda, and all written by one Rufus Randolph, a distant relative of Francis and Gabriel Marion.

To make of the whole a story, such as entertained myself at least, was a trifling task compared with the labor which had been performed by the young writer, and verily it was a labor of love, for while working over the faded pages I came to learn many things concerning that heroic struggle which the "Swamp Fox" made against overwhelming forces bent on devastating the fair colony of South Carolina, and I have done little more in the pages which follow than transcribe his own story.

So much for the reason why "The Minute Boys of South Carolina" has been put into print, and now, because Rufus Randolph failed to set down anything concerning those terrible days after Sir

Henry Clinton captured the city of Charleston, I ask that the following extracts from the historian Lossing's "Field Book of the Revolution," a goodly portion of which I have condensed lest one weary with the reading, be studied with some care.

"The fall of Charleston, and loss of Lincoln's army, paralyzed the Republican strength at the South, and the British commanders confidently believed that the finishing-stroke of the war had been given."

"Clinton sailed for New York on the fifth of June, leaving Cornwallis in chief command of the British troops at the South. Before his departure, Clinton issued a proclamation, declaring all persons not in military service, who were prisoners at Charleston, released from their paroles, provided they returned to their allegiance as subjects of Great Britain. So far, well; but not the sequel. All persons refusing to comply with this requisition were declared to be enemies and rebels, and were to be treated accordingly. And more; they were required to enroll themselves as militia under the king's standard. This flagrant violation of the terms of capitulation aroused a spirit of indignant defiance, which proved a powerful lever in overturning the royal power in the South. Many considered themselves released from all the obligations of their paroles, and immediately armed themselves in defence of their homes and country, while others refused to exchange their paroles for any new conditions. The silent influence of eminent citizens who took this course was now perceived by Corn-

wallis, and, in further violation of the conditions of capitulation, he sent many leading men of Charleston as close prisoners to St. Augustine, while a large number of the Continental soldiers were cast into the loathsome prison-ships, and other vessels in the harbor."

"But when the trumpet-blasts of the conqueror of Burgoyne were heard upon the Roanoke, and the brave hearts of Virginia and North Carolina were gathering around the standard of Gates, the patriots of the South lifted up their heads, and many of them, like Samson rising in strength, broke the feeble cords of 'paroles' and 'protections,' and smote the Philistines of the crown with mighty energy. Sumter sounded the bugle among the hills on the Catawba and Broad Rivers; Marion's shrill whistle rang amid the swamps on the Pedee; and Pickens and Clarke called forth the brave sons of liberty upon the banks of the Saluda, the Savannah, the Ogeechee, and the Alatamaha.

"Fortunately for the Republican cause, an accident prevented Marion being among the prisoners when Charleston fell, and he was yet at liberty, having no parole to violate, to arouse his countrymen to make further efforts against the invaders. While yet unable to be active, he took refuge in the swamps upon the Black River, while Governor Rutledge, Colonel Horry, and others, who had escaped the disasters at Charleston, were in North Carolina arousing the people of that State to meet the danger which stood menacing upon its southern border. Marion's military genius and great bra-

very were known to friends and foes, and while the latter sought to entrap him, the former held over him the shield of their vigilance. 'In the moment of alarm he was sped from house to house, from tree to thicket, from the thicket to the swamp.'"

"It was while in the camp of Gates that Governor Rutledge, who also was there, commissioned Marion a brigadier, and he sped to the district of Williamsburg, between the Santee and Pedee, to lead its rising patriots to the field of active military duties. They had accepted the protection of British power after Charleston was surrendered, in common with their subdued brethren of the low country; but when Clinton's proclamation was promulgated, making active service for the crown or the penalty of rebellion an alternative, they eagerly chose the latter, and lifted the strong arm-resistance to tyranny. They called Marion to be their leader, and of these men he formed his efficient brigade, the terror of British scouts and outposts. Near the mouth of Lynch's Creek he assumed the command, and among the interminable swamps upon Snow's Island, near the junction of that stream with the Great Pedee, he made his chief rendezvous during the greater portion of his independent partisan warfare."

Having thus refreshed your memory with the facts just given, remember that that which follows is the work of Rufus Randolph, and not of your friend,

JAMES OTIS.

THE MINUTE BOYS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

CHAPTER I

GABRIEL AND RUFUS

THE king's forces laid siege to Charleston, in the State of South Carolina, on the very day that Gabriel Marion was sixteen years old, and when I was come to the same age the Continental forces made their first sortie, as I remember full well because of the fact that General Moultre's brother was then killed. Thus it will be seen that Gabriel was my senior only by fifteen days, for it must be fresh in the minds of every one that Sir Henry Clinton opened fire on Charleston the fifth day of April, in the year of grace 1780; that the Americans made their first sortie on the twentieth; that on the sixth day of May the besiegers completed their third parallel, and on the twelfth the city was in the possession of the king's troops.

There is no good reason why I should go into details concerning the siege and capture of Charleston, because they are well known to everybody;

but I have used the facts as a starting-point of what may prove to be a story such as can be told to lads who shall live after I have gone out of this world. It seems no more than proper to do so, for it was while the British shot and shell were screaming over our heads as we aided in the defence as boys might, that Gabriel Marion, brother of that General Marion whom the minions of the king dubbed "Swamp Fox," determined to profit by the example which the lads in the eastern States had set us, and once the time should be ripe, band the lads of South Carolina together under the name of Minute Boys.

Many a time, as Gabriel and I staggered here and there under the burden of ammunition for our elders, who had permitted that we take part in the defence to the extent of supplying the different guns with powder and ball, — and so small was our store that we were forced now and again to carry it an exceeding long distance, — many a time, as I have said, while we were thus engaged Gabriel and I turned the matter over in our minds, vowing that as soon as the king's hirelings had been beaten back, as we had no doubt soon would be the case, the Minute Boys of South Carolina should come into existence as an organization distinct from the regular army.

Warm friends were Gabriel and I, with never a difference between us save when, owing to the fact that my name was Rufus and my hair all too vividly red for my own pleasure, he would persist in calling me William Rufus, giving me the name

of that king who was known as "The Red," and it vexed me sorely at times, because, although not responsible for my personal appearance, the shock of red hair with which nature had endowed me was so conspicuous as to call forth comment from all who saw it for the first time.

It was as if he called me "carrot-top," when he tacked on to my name Rufus, that of William, because the youngest schoolboy knows that William Rufus's hair showed out so conspicuous that his soldiers were as prone to follow it into battle, when perchance a lock was exposed beneath his helmet, as they were to rally around his flag.

However, the color of my hair, and what Gabriel Marion might say in sport regarding it, has nothing to do with that which I propose to set down, save that it will serve to show now and again why I lost control of my temper on being greeted by the name of a king.

Gabriel Marion lived with his brother, Francis, who was made lieutenant-colonel at Savannah the year previous to the siege, in St. John's Parish, but at the time when Clinton appeared off Edisto Inlet, the colonel was ordered to Charleston, and with him came Gabriel who took up his abode in my home, for it was in that fair city I had been born.

As you know, Charleston was surrendered on terms which to some seemed honorable, while others declared them to be humiliating, and then came that proclamation from Sir Henry Clinton which aroused the ire of every person, young or

old, male or female, in South Carolina. Following closely upon it, as if it were but the natural sequel, came the arrest of Lieutenant-Governor Gadsen and seventy-seven of the most influential men, thus giving all our people to understand how little of faith we could put in any declaration of those who had invaded our land. After that August morning, when we saw the chief men of the city marched away to the loathsome prison-ships in the harbor, there was but one desire in the hearts of those who hoped to see their State rid of the oppressive yoke which the king had put upon it, and that was to flee to some place where they might act the part they had sworn to act, and each do his full share toward making reprisals, for the victory of the king's forces had well-nigh crushed out from our breasts the belief that we might make of the States so lately declared free and independent, a nation of freemen.

I am not minded to go into detail concerning the flight of this family or that from the stricken city, as there is in the story so much of sorrow, or pain, ay, of shame, that it is not well to let the mind rest upon it. Rather should we think of what has been accomplished since, of how we wiped out the disgrace, if disgrace it can be called when our people were whipped through sheer strength of numbers rather than superior bravery or better knowledge of warfare.

Suffice it to say that among those who did steal secretly out of the city, or tried to do so, vowing to avenge the wrongs that had been perpetrated,

were Gabriel Marion and I. My mother and invalid father had set off for General Marion's home on the very day after the capitulation, and I was left to follow my own inclinations so that they had the bent of my father's advice, which was that, although not a man in years, it was my duty to do a man's full work in striking off the shackles which the king's misrule had fastened upon us.

It was not as easy for two stout lads like Gabriel and myself to leave the city as it was for the women, the sick, or the helpless, and before we found an opportunity to give the redcoats the slip, word was brought by a negro, who had contrived to make his way through the British lines with a message of mouth, that General Marion, his broken leg having been healed and he made brigadier-general, had fled to Snow's Island, where he awaited the coming of those who were eager to continue in arms against the victorious foe.

And now, just a word in regard to the rendezvous, lest some there be who may not understand how an island can be situated inland, or where this particular place is located. In Williamsburg district, where the Great Pedee is joined by Lynch's Creek, the united streams are divided for a certain distance by a swampy piece of land with here and there solid ground upon it. The rivers come together again at the mouth, thus forming what we call Snow's Island. Desperate indeed must be the fortune of those who would seek such a refuge, for a guide was necessary in order to lead one safely across the swamp-lands on either side of the river

to the few places where a man might lie down without fear of being drowned. The only advantage it could possess was that the enemy might not come upon it readily, and never gain the solid portion of the surrounding country without being piloted by those who knew well the devious passages.

Now you can understand why Gabriel's brother was dubbed the "Swamp Fox" by those who sought so vainly to entrap him, and you may also have some faint idea of the hardships which we two lads knew must be encountered before we could gain the rendezvous, for more than two-thirds of the journey must be made over morass and swamp not unlike that which I have just been describing.

However, we had little care, time, or thought for the dangers to be encountered, because we were fleeing from that peril which seemed greater than any we could meet, and it was by no means imaginary. We had already seen the chief men of Charleston marched under heavy guard to the prison-ships, where were horrors so great that it would chill the blood of one to describe them, and if Sir Henry Clinton's forces dared lay hands upon the leading citizens of South Carolina, we knew full well that two lads like ourselves would have but short shrift if peradventure they had cause to suspect us of what they were pleased to call treason.

Our plan, if indeed we had a plan at that time, was to take a boat up Cooper River, thence into the West River to that portion of St. John's Parish where was located Gabriel's home, and trust to the

chance of getting horses there; strike straight across the country to Gardine's Ferry, and thence to Snow's Island as the disposition of the British forces would allow.

Since we could not form a company of Minute Boys very well with but two members, before setting out we cast about for such of our acquaintances as were sufficiently strong in the backbone to permit of their sharing the dangers with us, and the first to whom we unfolded our plan was Archie Gordon.

But few words were necessary to enlist him in this scheme. Although a full year younger than Gabriel and I, he was possessed with the same fever to exact reprisals from the foe as were we, and without waiting until all our half-formed plans should have been detailed, he announced his purpose of joining us, declaring that he was not only ready to set out immediately, but happened to know where we might find a skiff which would be suited to our purpose.

While we were talking with him, Seth Hastings, a lad of seventeen years or thereabouts, came up, and I would have held my peace while he lingered near by, because of ever having distrusted the lad. His shifty eyes, which refused to look squarely upon one; his love of telling a lie when the truth would have served him better; the fact that he would betray one playmate, if opportunity arose, to another in the hope of provoking some small quarrel — all these things combined to make me suspicious of the lad even when he spoke most fairly, and I would

almost as soon have gone to the red-coated soldiers with the plan as to have confided it to Seth Hastings.

But Gabriel Marion, who could never see aught of evil in any person save those who wore the king's livery, welcomed him heartily as he came up, and without waiting to learn if Archie and I were of the mind to enlist this possible recruit, at once acquainted him with the plan, urging that he enroll himself with us as Minute Boys of South Carolina.

It may have been that I was overly suspicious, for perhaps at that moment Seth had no idea of playing the traitor to those whom he called comrades; but I fancied there was in his eyes a gleam of — I know not what to call it, yet the look which was in those shifty orbs disquieted me, and I would have given much had it been possible to recall Gabriel's incautious words.

They had been spoken, however; Seth Hastings was in possession of our secret, which, if known to the British commander or any of his staff, would have consigned us instantly to the reeking, filthy prison-ships where so many brave hearts were languishing nigh unto death. He knew all our plan, and it was too late to draw back.

While Gabriel argued with him as to why he should join us, I cast about in my mind as to how we might hold him true — how it would be possible to prevent him from betraying us before we had set off on the journey, and therefore it was that by the time Seth had agreed to make one of what we

hoped would soon be a company of Minute Boys, I proposed that we start immediately, not waiting for more recruits lest opportunity for leaving the city be lost.

"But we have neither arms nor provisions," Archie Gordon objected, and it must be remembered that immediately after the surrender of Charleston squads of red-coated soldiers had marched up this street and down that searching every house for weapons and ammunition, seizing upon everything of such nature as could be found.

"We had better go off unarmed and hungry, than not go at all," I replied quickly, at the same time glancing toward Gabriel in the hope that he might read in my face somewhat of the distrust which was in my heart; but, honest even to a fault as he was, he failed to take the hint, and on the instant began arguing with me as to why we should delay our departure for at least eight and forty hours.

All the reasons for delay which Gabriel and Archie brought up were good, and not to be combated by me justly, for it seemed little less than folly for four lads to set off empty-handed, with no plausible pretext for such a journey, and take every risk of being arrested by the first of the king's troops whom they might come across.

Gabriel claimed that by delaying no more than four and twenty hours we could enlist a full dozen lads, and in the meanwhile, perhaps, gain possession of arms, all of which I knew to be true.

Archie insisted that even though we were able to

join General Marion as we counted on, it would be a sorry reception we should receive, for, without weapons and lacking food, we might be an incumbrance rather than assistance to the cause.

I fancied that Seth, after listening to these well-founded arguments, and as it seemed to me turning them over fully in his mind, was unduly eager for delay, all of which I attributed to his desire to play us some trick which would prove our undoing.

Therefore did I insist all the more strongly that we set off without the delay of a single minute, urging the matter so vehemently that it was as if they grew weary with trying to convince me of my own folly, and agreed to start whenever I should say the word.

Then it was that I showed myself a fool beyond question, for, having gained the point, I should have carried out the plan fully even as I had shown myself eager to do; but at the last moment, when there was no refusal on the part of my comrades, and even Seth Hastings seemed willing to abide by the decision, I played the simple.

Having suddenly grown timid at the thought of setting off without so much as would serve to sustain life during four and twenty hours, I proposed that we separate to gather up such food as might be got at immediately, meeting an hour later at the place where Archie said the skiff was hidden.

I, who had been so suspicious, and the only one to distrust Seth, had in the very moment of persuading my comrades to do as I desired, given him every opportunity to play the traitor, for surely an

hour was as good as four and twenty if he was disposed to work us harm.

However, in my thick-headedness I failed to take heed of this fact, even though to this day it puzzles me to understand how I should have been such a blunderer, and believed that he, like the other members of the party, would spend all his time collecting so much in the way of provisions as might serve to save us from actual suffering.

Strange though it may seem, when I left that traitorous hound who agreed to be at the rendezvous sixty minutes later, there was no thought in my mind as to the possibility which I had allowed for treason, nor did the idea occur to me while I was hurrying here and there gathering such few articles as might be come at handily, for we were not overly well provided with provisions in those days after the occupation of the city by the British, when the red-coated soldiers had taken everything they could lay their hands on.

Left in charge of my home, not with any idea that he could protect it or prevent the king's hirelings from working their will with the property, was an old slave, a negro who had been born on my grandfather's plantation, and in whom I could trust as in my own people. To him I explained what it was my purpose to do, and after we two had gathered up such store of cooked food as I might carry conveniently, he thrust into my hands a pistol, explaining that my father had unintentionally left it behind when he set off so hurriedly for St. John's Parish. The weapon was charged; but,

so old Simon assured me, there was neither powder nor ball in the house save so much as the steel barrel contained.

My home was at the corner of Elizabeth and Charlotte Streets facing Wragg Square, and when I set off with old Simon's prayers that no harm might befall me ringing in my ears, my intention was to go down Chapel Street to Concord, and thence to Reid Street, where I could gain the water-front at the wharf which jutted out near Fort Washington.

It was only at the latter portion of the journey that danger to my plans might be anticipated, for there would I meet a strong British guard, who would or would not, as their fancy dictated, detain me, and the fancy of those royal troops at times was something to be greatly feared.

Only two persons did I meet during this distance, which was traversed by me as rapidly as possible, and I was by no means surprised because our people failed to be abroad, for in those dark days we who struggled against the king hid like rats in their holes, while our city was in possession of the enemy.

It was when I arrived within sight of the fort that my heart came into my throat, knowing that now was the critical moment, yet had I spent many days pondering over a plan, I could not have laid the time for departure more happily, for when I came near the fortification the noonday meal had just been portioned out to the soldiers, and they were so busily employed in ministering to their

swine-like appetites as to give no heed to a boy like me.

"It is a good omen," I said to myself as I gained the water's edge without having been challenged, and then again did I prove myself a simple, for he who trades upon the future, claiming that the past is any proof of that which is to come, has indeed lost his wits.

I arrived at the rendezvous triumphant and serene in mind, a good five minutes before the time appointed, but found Gabriel Marion already awaiting me. He looked dejected, as if matters had gone awry, and I asked laughingly, for at the moment my spirits were high:

"Have you failed to find anything that can be eaten, lad?" and he replied with a mournful shake of the head:

"I am too much of a stranger in the city to be able to burst into a house uninvited and demand provisions. It was useless for me to go to your home, which I have called mine since coming to Charleston, for I knew you would bring away from there everything which might be of benefit to us, and where could I have gone in the hope of getting that which we need? Therefore have I come empty-handed, save for so much of powder and lead as you see in this bag."

He held toward me a small sack which might have contained a quart at the most, and was now more than one-third filled.

"That is a richer find than you believed, Gabriel," I said cheerily, at the same time produc-

ing the pistol old Simon had given me, "for we should be able to cut the bullets to fit these barrels, and although only a toy like this may not count for much against the king's weapons, it is better than being empty-handed."

Then I showed him my store of provisions, which, small though it was, might suffice not very hungry boys for two meals, and he seemed to think we were fairly well supplied.

"I cannot but believe, Rufus, that it is unwise thus to start off so suddenly and so unprepared," he said, pulling aside the bushes which grew near a small creek making up from the river, disclosing to view the skiff of which Archie had spoken. "It would have been different if we knew that some important movement was near at hand, but thus to set off as if our friends needed us most urgently, giving no heed to what we might carry which would advantage them as well as ourselves, appears to me much like folly."

Then it was I explained why I had argued for a hurried departure, repeating that the desire to get away was great owing to the distrust in my mind regarding Seth Hastings, and when I was come to an end, he, opening his eyes full upon me, exclaimed:

"And with all that in your heart you have given him an opportunity to play the traitor, if so be he is inclined that way!"

Again I repeat that not until this moment did I realize the fact, and then like a flood came upon me all the suspicions which had been mine a short

hour previous. Like the simple that I was, I would have given way to words of self-reproach and anger, but that he hushed me by laying his hand on my arm as he said:

"There is no good reason why you add to your folly, if folly it was, for such mischief as Seth may be willing to do has already been brought about. Yet, Rufus, I cannot agree with you that the lad would do such a thing. Why should he betray us who never did him any wrong? Why should he be willing to deliver into prison-ships boys like us, when it cannot benefit him one jot? It is no crime that, because of some weakness, he is unable to look a fellow squarely in the face. There are many of us who have mannerisms disagreeable to others, and yet we would feel aggrieved if they were set down, as you account Seth's, like actual crimes."

I began to grow ashamed of myself under Gabriel's quiet and convincing reasoning, and just then Archie Gordon joined us, bearing on his shoulder a well-filled sack which told how successful he had been in his search for provisions.

"Huzza for Archie!" I cried, forgetting for the moment all that which had caused me uneasiness of mind. "How does it chance that you were allowed to come through the streets with such a burden?"

"It is neither more nor less than good fortune, William Rufus," the lad replied laughingly, and then, as if it was necessary I prove myself a simple in every possible way on that day, I took offence at the name he had put upon me, spending many

a precious moment trying to convince him it might be dangerous sport to thus jest at what I had almost come to believe was my misfortune.

In this senseless manner I must have spent ten minutes or more, heeding not the fact that it was Archie who had brought us the provisions of which we stood sorely in need. No one can say how long my foolish tongue might have argued on the subject, had not Gabriel Marion, cool-headed lad that he was, insisted we could settle all disputes while paddling up the river, but Archie cried, as I ran toward the skiff with the intention of leaping in:

"We have yet to wait for Seth! It may be he is having better fortune than either of us, and we will set out on our journey as well equipped as if having spent a week in preparation."

"There he comes now," Gabriel said, pointing up Reid Street, and as he spoke he stepped aboard the skiff in readiness to push off.

I was so deeply occupied with the offence committed by Archie in calling me William Rufus, that I did not follow with my eyes the direction indicated by Gabriel's outstretched finger, but leaped aboard the craft, having no more than cleared the gunwale when Archie cried in an accent of terror:

"He is coming; but pursued by four redcoats!"

Then it was that all the fear which had possessed me a short time previous returned with greater force, for instead of believing the boy was chased by the soldiers, I understood as clearly as if he himself had shouted to apprise us of the fact, that

his delay had been caused solely in order he might give information of that which we would do.

"The cowardly traitor!" I cried in a frenzy of rage. "He has played us false, and is bringing the bloody-backs down to take us prisoners!"

I was conscious, without raising my eyes to look, that Archie gave a quick glance over his shoulder, and then, dropping the precious sack of provisions, he leaped into the skiff, pushing it off at the same moment I gathered sufficient of wit to pick up a paddle in order to shove the light craft farther out into the current.

I question if either of us three lads realized that we were proving to the redcoats that our purpose was such as would not stand before the scrutiny of their officers — that we were really outlawing ourselves with but little hope of escape, when it would seem wiser if we stood boldly before them, for there was nothing in the bag nor on our persons which could give color to any story Seth Hastings might have told.

However, we had begun the flight, and neither questioned the wisdom of so doing, although we knew that before sixty seconds had passed the redcoats would fire upon us.

CHAPTER II

THE PURSUIT

As has already been said, I seized one of the paddles immediately upon jumping aboard the skiff, and when Archie Gordon shoved off the frail craft he possessed himself of the blade which lay in the bow of the boat.

It is hardly necessary to say that neither of us needed urging, but began to send the light craft ahead at the fastest possible pace, and Gabriel Marion was not one whit behind us in making ready for the flight. When he would have joined his efforts to ours, however, thus making it necessary for us to work two paddles on one side with only one opposite them, I said in a tone no wise like a command, but rather as a suggestion:

"You had best give all your mind to steering, Gabriel, for we shall make better speed, Archie and I, if it is not necessary for us to look to the course."

And he, mindful of others, as the dear lad ever was, whispered warningly:

"Bend as low to your work as possible, for we are like to have a shower of lead when the bloody-backs shall have come up from behind the bushes."

Desperate as our strait was, and knowing full well our very lives depended upon the efforts we made at that time, I ventured to look back over my shoulder in order to learn what that traitorous Seth Hastings might be doing, and at the same time to register a vow that if God spared my life I would some day repay him in full for this piece of wanton treachery.

The cur was hanging back behind the soldiers whom he had piloted, as if fearing we might make some attack and his precious skin thereby receive injury, while the redcoats were pushing on as eagerly as dogs do after a fox, unslinging their muskets as they came, and I whispered, to give greater emphasis to Gabriel's warning:

"We are like to catch it hot precious soon now, for the bloody-backs are making ready to fire."

"Save your breath, lad, save your breath! Whatsoever we may say now will not change the situation by a hair's breadth, and verily are we needing both strength and wind if, peradventure, they fail to hit all three of us at the first volley."

Never before, even while engaged in a friendly contest of skill, had I worked so desperately at the paddle. It was a stout ashen blade, yet it bent like a bow betwixt the resistance of the water and the pressure of my hands; at another time, when the stakes were less than life itself, I could not have hoped to curve the wood however slightly. I dare venture to say that Archie Gordon was putting forth every ounce of his strength even as I was of mine, for the lad had good pluck and a strong

arm, together with sufficient of temper to lend fictitious vigor at such a moment.

Save as I have already set down, our flight was made in silence, except for the music of the water as it rippled against the sides of the skiff, telling of the speed we were making, and although less than a minute had really elapsed since we pushed out into the current, it seemed to me that a full quarter of an hour must have sped before we heard the rattle of musketry and the singing of the bullets as they passed above our heads.

The king's men overshot their mark, otherwise the aim was good, for had the weapons been depressed ever so little some of the missiles must have found their billets in our bodies.

Once the muskets had been discharged I felt a sense of wondrous relief, for now must we have a respite during such time as would be required for the enemy to recharge the weapons, and I laughed aloud even while expending every ounce of strength upon the paddle, whereat Gabriel said in a tone of irritation:

"The situation may not be so comical when next they fire," and Archie replied in a tone that warmed my heart:

"They won't shoot until after having reloaded, and we will crow while we have the opportunity." Then, half-turning, he shouted over his shoulder to that miserable cur of a Seth Hastings, "If it so be we give your hounds the slip this time, Seth, my boy, I'll undertake to come back to Charleston as soon as may be — surely before any other can take

your precious life, and repay the score which you have set for us to wipe out."

No fellow could have resisted the temptation, however great the need of his laboring at the paddle, to look back in order to note what effect these words had upon the traitor, and, glancing at him an instant, I fancied I saw, even at such a distance, the gray pallor of fear come over his face. Certain it is he slackened pace, while the soldiers, instead of recharging their weapons, were making their way along the shore at full speed in chase of us, as if forgetting that it was upon their muskets and not their legs they must rely.

"Keep to your work, lads," Gabriel whispered warningly. "The cost of bantering words may be too great, and we cannot afford to receive even the slightest wound if peradventure it can be avoided."

He had the right to take command at that moment, for I question if he had turned his eyes ever so slightly, however great was the provocation; but kept his gaze straight up-stream that we might not deviate from the direct course by so much as a single inch. However, he knew full well that we could not fail of being eager to know whether our pursuers were gaining on us, and said after a brief pause:

"Work the paddles as you have begun, and we may give them the slip, even though the odds seem so great against us. I will tell you what they are about."

Then, as we forced the light skiff ahead, literally

lifting her on the water, he called out whenever there was any change in the situation, thus picturing to us what we had no time to gaze at.

"The soldiers are still running, and have not stopped to reload their weapons — Seth Hastings has turned about as if afraid to join in the chase — I can see no craft along the shore, and yet it must be the redcoats know of one, else why do they continue on foot instead of recharging their muskets? When one of you fellows gets winded, change places with me, for this speed must not be slackened! Now the bloody-backs have halted and are reloading — one has taken aim! Crouch low, boys! Crouch low!"

Even as he spoke came the crackling of a weapon. A bullet struck the gunwale of the skiff within two inches of Archie's hand, and I was dismayed because only a single gun had been fired. If they shot at us in a volley, the agony of anticipation would soon be over, whereas if each fired when he was ready we must be in continual apprehension of being hit.

"Look out now, another man is making ready!" Gabriel continued, and a second later came the report of his weapon, followed almost immediately by a third and a fourth, whereat our helmsman shouted as if victory was assured:

"Every bullet went wild! They are getting too much excited to be able to take aim! Keep the pace five minutes longer, and I dare venture to say we shall be out of range! Let me spell one of you now!"

"'FIVE MINUTES LONGER AND WE SHALL BE OUT OF RANGE!'"

"Stay where you are!" I shouted hoarsely. "We cannot afford to change places at such a time as this!"

I might go on telling of this chase until whosoever may read would be wearied with the repetition of words, and at the same time fail in attempting to portray all the feverish excitement which was ours during the short race, for it was as if I lived an hour in every moment. Although perhaps no more than ten minutes elapsed from the time we swung the skiff out into the current until the soldiers turned back, understanding it was folly to pursue us further, it seemed to me as if the day was already spent when Gabriel cried:

"Take it easy, lads; we are free from that squad at least, and if it so be the king has not in South Carolina men who can shoot with truer aim, then are we likely to live to a ripe old age, so far as danger from leaden missiles is concerned."

It was high time the race had come to an end, for I was so nearly spent with the frantic efforts that it is a question whether I could have swung the paddle a dozen times more, even though knowing that my life depended upon the effort, and Archie Gordon was in no better physical condition than I, seeing which, Gabriel came amidships with his steering paddle, continuing to force the light craft ahead as he said cheerily:

"Lie back and take it easy, lads, for I can well do considerably more than stem this current," and he made his words good, paddling with rare skill; it is no easy matter to keep a craft in the true direc-

tion with but one blade, for the best of boatmen will send her yawing from side to side however much they may struggle to prevent it.

Archie and I sat in the bottom of the skiff limp as rags, now the excitement was over, breathing like broken-winded horses, but with a hymn of thanksgiving in our hearts that we had escaped from those who would have sent us to that which was worse than death itself — the prison-ships; and when it was possible for me to speak so that the words could be understood by those who heard, I said, as if believing myself the son of a prophet:

"Who shall say now that we lads may not be able to work benefit to the Cause, if at the very outset of our attempt we have been able to thwart the plan of a traitor while we ourselves were the same as unarmed and caught in a trap? Surely after arriving where we may be put on the footing of soldiers, it will be possible for us to do men's work."

Well was it for me that we mortals are denied the privilege of looking into the future, for if I had known that one of us three lads was to meet a treacherous death before we were well started in our work as "Minute Boys," then might I have turned my back in dismay upon the task, and the aid which we were enabled to give the Cause would have been lacking at the very time when it was of greatest avail.

However, it is not for me to look forward while setting down these poor accounts of what we lads of South Carolina did, and although the grief is

as fresh in my heart now as on that terrible day, I must strive to repress it in order that that which I am trying to tell shall run on in proper sequence of events.

"We had best not crow too soon or too loudly," Archie Gordon said grimly. "Although we may travel from here to Snow's Island without further difficulty, and then be able to accomplish all we propose to do, there will be no good reason for congratulations until we have served out that cowardly traitor, who, without provocation, would have compassed our death."

"If we are able to labor for the Cause it must be with a singleness of purpose," Gabriel Marion said gravely, and one might have thought it was his elder brother who spoke, for the tone and words were not such as one would expect from a lad like him. "I grant you that Seth Hastings must receive due reward for what he has done; but so long as the king's soldiers remain in South Carolina, so long must we put aside every thought save that of driving them from the soil! And now, since we have hardly but begun the long journey, and have our faces turned toward many a danger, instead of talking of revenge and boasting of our escape, let us do all we may toward carrying out this first portion of the plan Rufus has formed, as a first step toward which, one of you had better take a swing at the paddle, thus giving me a better show of sending the craft ahead at proper pace."

"We will do better than that," I cried, springing to my feet, ashamed of having remained idle

so long. "Neither Archie nor I need any more coddling," and even as I spoke our brave little comrade dipped his paddle into the water once more, causing the skiff to dash swiftly forward again, heading as directly for our destination — Gabriel's home — as the winding of the channel would permit.

And now, lest I set down too many words in the telling of what should be a short tale, I will make no attempt at recording that which we said or did while sailing up Cooper River, but content myself with putting down the fact that shortly after daybreak next morning we were come to the landing which led to the house where my parents, as I have already said, had found a refuge. Neither is it necessary for me to describe the greetings which were ours, nor how my heart swelled with pride and joy as I heard my father say, even while mother was pressing me to her bosom, as if I had but lately come from the very jaws of death:

"You and your companions have done well, Rufus, to take upon yourselves the work of men. In these times children must grow old rapidly that they may fill the place and do the work of those whom the king's hirelings kill and maim."

It was as if I felt my mother shudder when father spoke these words which told that he was in full accord with our purpose to become soldiers, but never a word of remonstrance did she utter. Looking back now, I can understand that she resolutely put far away the motherly love which would shelter and protect her child, allowing us three

lads to think she was only concerned in our welfare as she busied herself either in giving orders, or in performing the bitter work herself of preparing an outfit for us who were to depart as soon as might be.

Father told us what we already knew, that General Marion had gone to Snow's Island, there to await the gathering of such as were ready to join him in the forlorn hope that we could beat back the invader even while his hands were upon our throat; and he advised that we remain where we were during four and twenty hours, saying in explanation of this advice, which might seem strange when one knew all the exigencies of the situation:

"It is hardly probable you can make all the necessary arrangements in a shorter time, and, besides, if you start from here fresh, the journey will be made in better time than if you set out already weary. I envy you, lads, the privilege of striking a blow in defence of the Carolinas. Would to God I might be able to play a man's part, instead of remaining here like some helpless child!"

Then it was that Gabriel Marion deftly turned the conversation, noting that my father was sorely troubled because of his helplessness at a time when men were so sadly needed, and asked whether it was known if many had joined his brother, whereupon my father replied:

"I question if that be probable. Only Captain Horry and half a dozen of the neighbors set off with him. It may be that their numbers have been doubled by this time, but I doubt if their force is

much increased, for many there be in South Carolina, I am ashamed to say, who deem it wiser at this time to serve the king rather than their own country."

Then we discussed as to which road it would be wisest to follow, and father held consultation with some of the older negroes who were familiar with the swamp and the country nearabout, until by nightfall we had not only mapped out a course, but were provided with an outfit such as was not to be despised in those days.

Old Peter, one of General Marion's house-servants, had volunteered to act as our guide across the swamp, and we accepted the service readily, knowing that his master would be pleased at our bringing him, while at the same time he could save us many a needless mile in the journey.

It was his advice that we strike across the country to what was known as Charleston road, following that boldly up until we came to the highway leading to Indian Village, after which we would take to the woods for a short cut to Snow's Island. By such a course we would come upon the different ferries, and thus have no trouble in crossing the streams unless, perchance, enemies were between us and our destination.

When one has fought and aided in the whipping of a king backed by a great nation, when one has stood a tiny atom in a ragged line of battle facing the on-coming of well-drilled, well-equipped European soldiers, and taken part in the crushing of that great machine into a panic-stricken mob, fill-

ing the brain with the heat of that fever which comes in the excitement of battle, it is dull telling simply of the march and of the bivouac. Perhaps because I cannot yet be called a man I linger in the setting down of that which we did where renown was won, than as to how we made our peaceful way from one part of the country to another. Therefore, if I err in describing with too little detail such part of my life while I was numbered among the "Minute Boys of South Carolina," as were dull or uneventful, the fault must be set down to my great desire to hurry forward into those scenes of moment.

It seems to me it should suffice if I say that on the morning after our arrival at Gabriel Marion's home we departed. I need not say aught concerning that last embrace of my mother's, or repeat father's blessing, which he bestowed on us all.

Old Peter, carrying even more of our stores upon his aged back than was right, yet insisting upon bearing the greater portion of the burden, went on in advance as a guide, mounted on as good a horse as either of us lads rode. We had taken from General Marion's plantation whatever might advantage us in the work, for anything he owned was at the service of his country. Thus it was we journeyed like soldiers, in the saddle, although we followed old Peter's advice and carried all our belongings upon our backs, the negro arguing that at any moment we might come upon the enemy, and in case of being forced to take to the woods, where we could not use the horses, we

would not go empty-handed if preparations for flight had been made in advance.

It chafed me not a little that at the very outset we should be preparing for defeat, but my father had backed up old Peter, and Gabriel Marion stoutly insisted that as we proposed to be good soldiers, so should we obey the first commands given by those who had the right to dictate — meaning in this case my father, not old Peter.

We rode on merrily, our only care being the possible danger which might be in advance of us, never dreaming of anything to be feared in the rear; making the journey across country to the Charleston road before the day was more than half-spent, and halting at night less than a mile south of Gardine's Ferry.

We spent no time in making camp, for none was needed. The horses were picketed in a small grove of cottonwood-trees, and we made a meal from the cooked provisions which we brought with us, after which every member of the party, even including the guide, lay down upon the ground wherever he pleased, giving no heed to keeping guard, because in our ignorance we lost sight of the possibility that the enemy might even at that moment be near at hand.

I question if it be not more wearying to spend a day in the saddle, to one who had not ridden for many months, than to walk during that length of time. For my part, I was thoroughly tired out when I threw myself upon the ground with no more care as to a bed than to use my saddle for a

pillow, and it was as if I had just composed myself to rest when I drifted off into slumber-land.

It seemed as if I had no more than closed my eyes in rest when I was awakened by being shaken violently, and on first returning to consciousness I heard old Peter whispering in my ear:

"Rouse up, Marse Randolph, I'se allowin' dem British sojers am near by."

I was awake on the instant, and then understood, from the absence of the moon, which had been shining when I fell asleep, that the night was more than half-gone. My comrades were already awake and on their feet, and Gabriel was saying in an anxious whisper as I joined them:

"It's certain that a party of horsemen have gone on up the road, for I heard the trample of hoofs even as old Peter awakened me. It stands us in hand to know whether they be friend or foe."

"Why should it concern us, if so be they travel rapidly enough to keep out of our way?" I asked like a simple, and Gabriel, true lad that he was, replied gently when he would have been warranted in speaking sharply:

"We must know what lies ahead of us, else are we like to ride into danger as do those who are blindfolded."

"And how do you count on finding out?" I asked irritably, for it vexed me to thus be deprived of the rest I needed.

"One of us must follow until it is certain the strangers have not gone into camp, and at daybreak the others may bring up the horses. I am

ready to act as scout, and you fellows may lie down again with the understanding that one or the other stand guard during the remainder of the night. Instead of showing ourselves worthy to become soldiers, we have acted like children in making camp as we did, for the first duty should have been to station a sentinel."

"You shall not go on alone," I said, now ashamed because of having given heed only to my own desires, and Archie stoutly claimed the right to go with us.

We might have argued on this question until another day had come, had not Gabriel said hurriedly:

"Since neither of you will take advantage of the opportunity to sleep, we'll all go, and if by daylight old Peter has heard nothing concerning us, he shall come up the road with the horses."

As Gabriel said, so we did, and with our weapons charged, for we had left General Marion's plantation fully equipped, we advanced swiftly, yet with due heed lest we overrun the quarry, leaving behind old Peter in a very disagreeable frame of mind, for his last words were a complaint that he was to be left in the rear when it was his duty to lead the way.

Not until we had travelled twenty minutes or more did I ask myself what was to be done in case we learned that the horsemen who had passed our camping-place were soldiers, and then I put the question to Gabriel.

"That shall be decided later," he replied quietly,

and one would have fancied he had been bred to the trade of a soldier, so calm and collected was he at this time when we might be running our necks into a noose. "If the party is made up of bloody-backs we may be certain they have learned of General Marion's whereabouts, and are hoping to entrap him, in which event we must make a détour in order to gain the advance, that we may warn those who are at Snow's Island. In case it should be so that we might, without too much risk, make a capture, why, then, I say, let us take such prisoners as is in our power, and, on arriving at the rendezvous, have something to prove our ability to act the part of soldiers."

It seemed to me that our business was to arrive at Snow's Island as quickly as might be, without any regard for prisoners or picking up information; but plainly Gabriel was fitted to be the commander of our little party, and I held my peace, although stoutly rebelling at the idea of undertaking the trade of a soldier before having made other preparations than that of arming ourselves.

After this brief conversation we continued on in silence, but at a rapid pace, and soon came to know that those in advance were in no great haste to arrive at their destination, for we heard the hoof-beats of horses in the distance, and once more Gabriel said:

"We will follow without making any attempt to overtake them, during an hour or more, and then if there is no change we must close up, for

I am not minded to walk at their heels like a dog until daybreak."

He had no more than ceased speaking when the sounds in the distance increased, and I came to a halt without waiting for orders; but Archie Gordon forced me on as he whispered:

"They are making camp, most likely, and now will we have the opportunity of finding out who they are, if so be we press on before they lie down."

Gabriel spoke no word, but, taking each of us by the arm, plunged straight into the bushes for twenty yards or more, and then advanced cautiously until it was possible for us to hear the sound of voices.

Now we wormed our way amid the foliage like Indians, taking care lest the breaking of a dry twig beneath our feet should betray us, and before ten minutes had passed were where we could see a portion of the party we had been pursuing.

A small fire was already built, and around it were gathered four or five men clad in the uniform of the king's soldiers, while here and there amid the bushes which grew close down to the side of the road, flitted dark figures not to be distinguished in the gloom, but which we knew were others of the enemy.

"What are they doing here?" Archie asked, as if he had forgotten we were on the road leading from Charleston, and Gabriel replied in a hoarse whisper:

"The chances are they have been sent to Snow's Island, or else are in pursuit of us."

"That last can hardly be true," I said, again

showing how simple I was. "The British commander would not think it necessary to send out so large a party for three unarmed boys."

"Ay, but suspecting, as they must if Seth Hastings told them my name, that we are bound for General Marion's rendezvous, it would be only wise to send a sufficient force to capture all the rebels that might be found at the end of the journey."

With this Gabriel crept yet nearer the camp-fire, and we followed him, moving ever so slowly, but halting not until having come within twenty feet or less, when it was possible to distinguish some of the words which were spoken.

As we lay there, hardly daring to breathe lest our presence should be betrayed, many of those who had been caring for the horses joined their comrades, and all appeared to be in the best of humor, but to our disappointment nothing was said regarding the purpose of their journey. Therefore we remained as much in the dark as before until suddenly there came between us and the glare of the camp-fire a figure which caused me to grip Gabriel's arm fiercely even as Archie Gordon's hand was pressing upon my shoulder as if he would bury his nails in my flesh.

Little wonder was it that we were filled with both surprise and alarm at the sight of this newcomer, for he was none other than that villainous renegade, Seth Hastings! It needed now no word from the men to tell us why they were here. That Seth had explained who Gabriel was, there could be no question, and because the cur was ignorant of the

fact that my mother and father had fled to General Marion's plantation, he had supposed we were making directly for Snow's Island.

That the whelp had offered his services as guide there was not the slightest doubt in my mind, and yet even at that time, when my anger and surprise were so great as to be nearly overwhelming, I asked myself again and again why it was that he, who had professed friendship for all three of us lads, should be doing what was in his power to compass our death. He was pursuing us like an avenger, and yet, rack my brain as I might, I could think of no act, however trifling, which he might have construed as against himself.

It was while I lay thus in a maze of perplexity, and perhaps fear, that Gabriel Marion pressed my hand significantly as he began to retrace his way through the bushes, and, as a matter of course, Archie and I followed, although it seemed to both of us at the time as if it were wiser to remain within sight of that villainous cur in the hope of putting a speedy end to his evil-doing.

CHAPTER III

RECRUITS

Not until we were so far from the redcoats' camp that there could be no danger our words might be overheard, however hot the discussion which was to ensue should become, did Gabriel halt, and I was eager to take advantage of this first opportunity of showing disapproval at our thus beating a retreat, as it were.

"It's not for me to say what you and Archie shall do," Gabriel began immediately he halted, and before I could so much as give words to the petulant thoughts in my mind. "As for myself, I see no good reason why we should linger near that encampment, and much cause for leaving as soon as possible."

"Now you are answering a protest which has come into your own mind," I cried, not a little irritated because he had taken the words out of my mouth, and he replied quietly:

"Ay, William Rufus, that is exactly what I am doing, for even though the night is none too light, I can see that you are disgruntled because I led you away from a place of danger. It needs not that you shall at all times proclaim your dissatis-

faction by words, for I can read much of what is in your mind by the movement of your body."

"And you would not have read my thought so easily but for the fact that you yourself must have questioned whether it was fitting for lads who count on becoming soldiers, to turn tail at the first show of danger," I replied hotly, and he irritated me yet further by saying, in what sounded to me like a tone of superiority:

"How would it have advantaged us in any way to lie hidden in front of yonder camp-fire watching the redcoats and that miserable cur, Seth Hastings? Was the picture so inviting that you would linger in order to gaze upon it? And when it was come daylight, if so be you loitered till then, what about the chance of your being discovered when old Peter brings up the horses, for I dare venture to say the negro will start at the first crack of dawn if we have not then returned?"

"How would it advantage us?" I cried hotly, allowing myself to be angered because in that time of danger he remembered to call me "William Rufus." "By remaining there we might perchance have learned the destination of the troop, which seems necessary, since the force is travelling in the same direction we desire to go."

"But we know as much as is needed," Archie Gordon broke in, and I understood on the instant that he approved of Gabriel's plan, whatever it might be. "That Seth Hastings is with the men tells beyond a doubt, at least so it seems to me, that they are heading for the rendezvous selected by

General Marion, in the hope of capturing not only him, but us lads as well."

"Ay, Archie Gordon, there you have hit the nail squarely as I would have struck it," Gabriel chimed in. "There was no reason for us to linger longer after having seen that traitorous cur, and good cause, as the matter presents itself to my mind, for us to make all speed with our backs turned toward the enemy."

"To what end?" I asked impatiently, and he replied, clapping me on the shoulder in a friendly way such as made me ashamed of my petulance.

"To the end that we may push on while there is opportunity to make the détour, if so be old Peter agrees that it may be done between now and daylight. If we can arrive at Snow's Island a few hours in advance of the British troops, and surely we should be able to do so with such horses as we have, then do we make doubly sure of receiving a hearty welcome, because the information we bring will be valuable to my brother."

Even before he had finished the somewhat lengthy explanation I understood he was in the right, as indeed I ever found him to be, for Gabriel Marion was one of those rare lads who argues out a matter with himself before giving an opinion.

From that moment, until we were arrived at the place where old Peter was awaiting us patiently, no further arguments were indulged in, and I left to Gabriel the duty of acquainting the negro with all we had learned. It was evident that Peter had a far better idea of the situation than I had shown

to be mine when finding fault with Gabriel because of beating a retreat, for he appeared to recognize without discussion the necessity of circling around the enemy to gain an advance, and in order to accomplish such purpose was most particular in his inquiries regarding the location of the halting-place.

Gabriel felt positive the enemy was a full quarter of a mile to the southward of the ferry, and Peter, after taking ample time to consider the matter, but in the meanwhile saddling the horses that no precious moments might be lost, announced that it was possible to do the trick if we should leave the highway we were then on, striking across the country until having arrived at the Santee road, and then go down to the ferry; but he admitted that by so doing there was a grave possibility of our coming upon the enemy, if peradventure we had made any mistake as to the location of the encampment.

"To my mind, we are in duty bound to take the chances, however opposed we may personally be to such a plan," Gabriel said, as he mounted his horse. "The information which we may be able to carry to Snow's Island is so important that we are warranted in running any risk, for the life of one or of all of us, as compared with the advantage which can be gained for the Cause, is as nothing. Is it your mind that we shall push on without delay?"

He turned to me while asking this question, and there was no longer the slightest tinge of impatience in my tone as I replied:

"It is for you to act the leader, Gabriel Marion, for surely there be none other in this party so well able to take command."

Having said this, I also mounted, to show my readiness to set off without further delay, and old Peter needed no words to tell him that the moment had come when he was to act the part of guide in good truth. Therefore he set off in advance, striking directly into the undergrowth, where our horses, although finding some difficulty in making their way, managed to maintain a fairly good rate of speed during two hours, when we came upon the Santee road, much to my surprise, for I had fancied the distance to be greater.

Once upon the highway, Gabriel leaped from the saddle and began tearing the one blanket which he carried into strips, as if he had suddenly lost his senses.

"We must do what we may toward muffling the sound of the horses' hoofs on the beaten road," he said hurriedly, and in a twinkling all three of us began the same task, for there was no need of further explanation.

Within ten minutes, for we worked to disadvantage in the night, having no cord with which to tie the muffling on the horses' feet, and then as fast as the steeds could be urged forward, for the woollen foot-covering crippled them to a certain extent, we rode toward the ferry, breathing quick with the excitement of the moment, because each step was bringing us nearer to a possible encounter, when the odds would be heavily against us.

As nearly as I could judge, there were yet two hours of the night remaining, and it seemed to me as if we were in a fair way of accomplishing our purpose, when suddenly, and at the very moment while I was congratulating myself upon Gabriel's foresight in hastening matters as he had, there came from the bushes on the side of the road fifty paces or more in advance of us, the thrilling cry:

"Halt, or we shall fire!"

Following this could be heard sounds of command, as if the unseen speaker was stationing a heavy force on either side of the road to enforce his demands.

On the instant my heart sank like lead, for I had no doubt but that we had come upon a considerable body of the enemy. It was reasonable to suppose that he who had spoken was the leader of the same party we had spied upon, and a similar thought must have been in Gabriel Marion's mind, for I heard him cry half to himself:

"What stupids we were to so miscalculate the location of the halting-place!"

As a matter of course we obeyed the command on the instant, there being nothing else left to do, for our party of four would have shown themselves little less than idiots to have made any attempt at riding down so formidable a body as was apparently directly in advance of us, and flight seemed equally fruitless. As I pulled my horse to a standstill there came to my eyes a picture of the prison-ships as I had seen them lying at anchor in Charleston harbor, and I could have cried aloud

in grief because of this sudden end which was put to our undertaking.

When we were come to a halt, remaining in the saddles without making any show of unslinging the muskets which were strapped across our backs, the same voice we had first heard, cried out, and I fancied that there was a difference in the tone, as if the speaker was inclined to be friendly:

"Who are you, and what is your purpose here?"

Had I considered myself in command of our little force, I should have been such a simple to have made some effort toward concealing our identity, but not so with Gabriel Marion. He realized that the truth of whatsoever we might say could speedily be proven or disproven, and he replied readily:

"We are three lads escaped from the British at Charleston, who hope to arrive at a rendezvous appointed by an officer in the Continental Army. We have with us as guide an old negro, and are striving to gain the ferry before a force of the enemy encamped on the Charleston road near at hand shall arrive there."

I thought of a verity that if there had been any possibility of our escaping the prison-ships, this answer had destroyed it, and friend though he was, I could have dealt Gabriel such a blow as would have sent him headlong from the saddle, because of what I believed was stupidity. Therefore it is that my astonishment may at least be faintly imagined, when I saw in the gloom of the night two small figures come hurriedly from out the screen

of bushes, advancing toward us as if overjoyed at the meeting, and I heard Archie Gordon cry half in delight, half in fear:

"Are you lads of South Carolina?"

"Ay, that we are," the foremost of the strangers replied, hastening forward until he stood where he could look up into Gabriel Marion's face. "We are making for the same rendezvous, if so be you have told us the truth."

It did not require many seconds for me to gather my scattered senses, and when this was done I realized how crafty these two had been to thus halt us, giving the impression that they were strong in numbers, for I could now understand, from seeing none others, that they alone had made such a show of force.

Gabriel, bending over until he could see clearly the face of the lad who stood near him, said quietly, even as though he had been expecting such a meeting:

"This, if I mistake not, is one of the Marshall lads, whose home is near about Eutaw Springs?"

"And you are General Marion's brother!" the boy cried in joyful surprise.

Then it was that we dismounted, and but a short time was needed in which to make each acquainted with the purpose of the other. These brave lads, having heard of the call sent out by General Marion, were hastening thus alone to obey the summons, so much of courage and a desire to aid the Cause was in their hearts. They had counted on taking with them four prisoners when they

heard us approach. It was a gallant deed, and I took somewhat of the credit to myself because they were South Carolinians.

When the Marshall boys — Edward and Joseph — had learned what it was our purpose to do, they proposed to join us as Minute Boys rather than enlist directly under General Marion's command, and thus we lads, who had but a few seconds previous believed we were doomed to imprisonment, gained two recruits of such metal as was needed in the organization.

It can well be understood that we did not waste much time after the explanations had been made, but pressed forward toward the ferry once more, as soon as the new recruits had muffled the feet of their horses, and I said to Archie Gordon as we rode along side by side:

"If it were possible to come across four or five more like these lads who have just joined us, we might be in shape to gather in those who are guided by that traitorous cur," and he replied, as if the idea gave him great pleasure:

"Ay, and it would be an adventure worth thinking about were we alone in this section of the country; but as it is, with our friends at Snow's Island ignorant of what is going on near about, I am of the opinion that however strong we might grow by reason of additional recruits, there could be no fair excuse for making any such attempt."

Now we had guides in plenty, for the Marshall boys were better acquainted with this section of the country than was Peter, and instead of making for

the ferry, where there was even chance we might find some of the troopers posted on guard, they proposed that we make a short cut to a point on the river fully half a mile above Gardine's Ferry, where they believed we could swim the horses across.

The only danger in such a crossing was that we would be obliged to travel over a considerable extent of swamp, but this both they and old Peter believed would be more advisable than taking the chances of meeting the enemy at the ferry.

As had been agreed upon, so we did, and although more than once after gaining the opposite bank of the stream did it seem possible the horses would be mired, we were so far successful that when the first glimpse of the coming day appeared in the eastern sky we were on the highway, riding swiftly toward that crossing of the Black River known as Potato Ferry.

From this moment it was as if all the difficulties had been removed from our path. When the sun set we were at Britain's Ferry, on the bank of the Great Pedee River, and Snow's Island was barely four miles away; but, owing to the darkness, Gabriel believed we were warranted in remaining where we were rather than in attempting to go down the stream, for daylight was needed in crossing to the rendezvous.

This time when we made camp we took hourly turns of standing watch, and when another day was come, after partaking of a hurried meal, we set out, arriving at our destination not without con-

siderable difficulty, owing to the fact that none of us knew the exact trail which would give us good footing, but yet suffering no more of hardships than might have been expected, and certainly none worth setting down here.

The day was yet young when finally we stood before General Marion to receive from him the heartiest greeting lads could ask for, and even old Peter came in for his full share.

The general had at this time no more than twenty men, well armed, but, as we afterward learned, with only a scanty store of provisions, and all this company gathered around us to learn the latest news from Charleston. Little did they dream that our arrival would be a signal for the first attack on the enemy since the fall of the city.

They were plunged in deepest grief when told of the wholesale arrests made by the British commander, Sir Henry Clinton, and each had some question to ask regarding the bearing of this or of that citizen while being marched through the streets of Charleston to where boats were taken for the prison-ships.

Gabriel, acting as our spokesman, as was indeed his right, since we two tacitly agreed to recognize him as leader, gave all the information possible, and not until this little band of patriots had finished with their questioning did he speak of our adventure on the Charleston road. Then, as may be fancied, every member of the company was wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement, for if the word which we brought was true, then could

they see in the near future an opportunity for striking a blow in retaliation.

General Marion questioned us particularly concerning the number of the men, and as to whether the company was made up of Tories or British soldiers, and to this question we could give no satisfactory reply. True it is that we had seen by the light of the camp-fire none save those who wore the red uniform, but we knew full well there were others hidden from our view by the bushes, therefore it was well within the range of possibility that the soldiers had in their company many Tories.

That which puzzled our friends was the same question as we had asked ourselves many times: Why Seth Hastings had thus suddenly and openly shown himself an enemy to the Cause, and why was he so eager that we lads be made prisoners?

It was a question which no one could answer satisfactorily, and General Marion put an end to our speculations by saying in a tone of pleasure:

"Before to-morrow morning, if indeed you are not mistaken as to the destination of the company, we will have in our keeping this Seth Hastings who has shown himself such a violent friend of the king's, and I doubt not that you lads may be able to get the desired information from him."

"Will you make an attack upon the company?" Gabriel asked quickly and eagerly.

"I think we shall, lad, and regardless of their numbers, else why have we gathered here?"

"But they are in reasonably large force," I ven-

tured to say, and the young general answered stoutly:

"Though they outnumbered us three to one, yet would we do it, so that every man among us might strike an effective blow, for it is work of such nature that will bring more recruits to the rendezvous than could be persuaded to join our forlorn hope under any other circumstances."

Then the commander of this "ragged regiment," as the king's soldiers were afterward pleased to term the company, turned away with Captain Horry, whom we soon came to learn was looked upon as second in command of this slender force, and the remainder of the party plied us with questions concerning what we had seen and heard since we fled from Charleston, until I was fairly weary with so much tongue-wagging.

Less than an hour after we arrived I observed that Captain Horry and another man crossed the river in one of the dugouts which were concealed along the shore of the swamp, and because they went on foot I knew full well they had gone to learn what might be possible regarding the approach of the enemy.

With this departure the men left off questioning us, to make ready for the encounter which they had every reason to believe was near at hand, and we, who had already begun to call ourselves Minute Boys, made a survey of this island which was destined to become the headquarters of as active a body of rangers as ever did service for the Colonies.

As I have already said, it was situated just below

the point where Lynch's Creek flows into the Pedee, and to my surprise I found that while it really deserved the name of swamp, for the land was evidently wet and marshy during such times as the river was filled with water, now the soil was comparatively dry, while the greater portion of the island was covered with trees, among which we were told could be found no small amount of game. The lower end of it was thickly grown up with cane-brake, and during our hurried exploration we found that already was corn planted here and there where nature had left open spaces. I questioned as to whether it was so late in the season that the grain would not arrive at maturity; but Archie, who had the eye of a farmer, suggested that even if it did not, the leaves would make excellent fodder for the horses, and surely the question of feeding the animals in this place where no grass grew was a matter which required considerable attention.

Our dinner, which was shared by every one on the island, consisted of the provisions which we had brought from General Marion's home, and when the meal was come to an end there was not sufficient left of our store to provide us lads with supper. But at that time we did not look very far into the future. Our situation was so desperate — this little handful of men and boys who were setting themselves to combat a victorious enemy — that beyond the present hour we gave little or no heed, trusting to the fortunes of war, and the charity of the planters, when put to for sufficient in the way of food, to keep us alive.

I am tempted to dwell upon the trifling incidents of this day at the rendezvous where there was little semblance of military authority, save that all recognized General Marion as the one who should map out the operations; but to do so would require more of space than can be given it, if I am to relate all which we Minute Boys of South Carolina succeeded in doing before the tyrant's forces were driven beyond the border. Therefore it is I must go straight on with such as we did which had a bearing upon the struggle our people were making for liberty, rather than indulge in reminiscences most pleasing to myself.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Captain Horry and his companion returned, and there was that written upon their faces which told that they were well satisfied with the information gained.

"It is as it should be," the captain said to General Marion as he came up from the bank of the stream to where the little company gathered immediately he was seen in the distance. "The force of which the lads gave warning number no more than forty, and are under command of Major Gainey. As nearly as can be told, from twenty to twenty-five of them are Tories, the remainder soldiers from Gainey's own regiment. They have gone into camp at Britain's Neck, I should guess in order to wait for reinforcements, fancying that we are too strong for them."

"Britain's Neck," the general said half to him-

self. "Then we have no need to start off until sunset."

Although I knew full well he would strike a blow however great the odds might be against him, it was with a certain sense of relief and satisfaction that I heard the words which gave the same meaning as if he had said he was determined to attack.

Then Captain Horry described the situation of the enemy's camp, which had been chosen near the river-bank and was backed by a small hill. If it had been the major's purpose to give us good opportunity to make reprisals, he could not have disposed of his men to better advantage for us, because even I, who knew so little of the art of war, understood that if it should be possible for us to gain the brow of the hill, we had the foe at our mercy. It was when Captain Horry had come to the end of his recital, that Archie Gordon asked eagerly:

"Did you see anything of Seth Hastings, sir, while you were spying upon the camp?"

"I have the good fortune not to be acquainted with that whelp; but fancy we saw him, for there was a lad with the Tories whom the troopers appeared to shun. These soldiers of the king's, cutthroats though they be, have no more love for a traitor than has an honest man, and you may set it down that so far as it is within their power, your enemy does not sleep among a bed of roses while among them."

"It makes very little difference to us, sir, how they may treat the cur; but we are eager to know if he yet remains with them, because we Minute

Boys will deal with him, and not give you gentlemen the trouble of looking after such a sneak."

"We Minute Boys?" General Marion repeated questioningly. "Have you lads already such an organization?"

I looked to Gabriel to make reply, which he did without hesitation:

"Ay, sir, we have, although at present our force is not very formidable, for the entire company is here assembled; but if so be we see much of the surrounding country, I venture to say that before the summer is past we will succeed in gathering such a troop as will not make either you or us ashamed."

"Well said, lad!" Captain Horry cried approvingly. "It is a good plan for you youngsters to band yourselves together, and that you have already made a start toward that end should shame those who are late in coming to this rendezvous because afraid to stand manfully against the foe."

And thus it was without further argument or comment that General Marion and his officers agreed we lads might form an independent company under his command.

The horses were looked after carefully at the close of this day, for although the distance from where we would cross the stream, to Britain's Neck, was no more than five miles, we needed to cover it with speed, and perhaps the necessity of returning swiftly would be as great as that of going. Therefore generous quantities of corn were dealt out from the slender stores, and the animals

groomed until they were in fine fettle for any patriot to ride.

Not until the sun had set was the word to move given, and then, each leading his horse, we went down into the stream, swimming the animals across while we clung to saddle, mane, or tail, as fancy dictated. When come to the opposite side we looked well to girths and weapons, for once having arrived at our destination, there would be no time to attend to such details if General Marion worked in his usual fashion.

Old Peter rode well in advance, still acting as one of the guides, and there was among us none more trusted than he, for I have little doubt but that the negro would have cheerfully yielded up his life had it been necessary to save either the general or Gabriel from harm.

We rode at a sharp trot on either side of the highway where the turf served to deaden the foot-falls of the horses, not drawing rein up hill or down until we were come to the elevation of which I have spoken as backing the camp of the foe.

Now it was we halted for the merest fraction of time that General Marion and Captain Horry might take the lead, the former saying as he passed us:

"Follow me, and see to it that you keep together, at least until we are well at the end of the charge."

Then, as we allowed the horses to walk up the hill through a heavy growth of timber wherein there was little or no underbrush, Gabriel, who rode between Archie and me, said in a whisper:

"We will follow the leader until such time as we catch a glimpse of Seth Hastings, and then, unless the redcoats make a stand when our services will be needed with the troop, we are to strike out for ourselves, because I am not minded that cur shall give us the slip."

"I am not certain I can do very much in the way of shooting from the saddle," I said, unslinging my musket, thus following the example of those around me, and Gabriel replied as if in alarm:

"Don't make any attempt to shoot the traitor, for then his troubles would soon be over, and I am of the mind that he needs more punishment in this world than a speedy death."

"I hope you do not propose that the Minute Boys shall turn Indians and give him a taste of torture?" Archie said sharply, and one of the men riding near at hand reproved him for speaking aloud, because it was of the utmost importance that we succeed in surprising the redcoats.

"We won't make quite such heathens of ourselves," Gabriel whispered sufficiently loud for me to hear; "but at the same time I almost believe we would be warranted in outdoing even the Indians toward the squaring of accounts. Once we clap our eyes on him, however, it is for us to ride the cur down, however far the chase may lead."

Save for such experience in warfare as I had had during the siege of Charleston, I was a novice in the soldier's trade, and had never yet fired a gun at a human being. Therefore it was little wonder that every nerve in my body was tingling

with the excitement of the moment, and my heart seemingly crowding its way up into my throat. The one fear I had was that if the enemy made a stand, and we were thus forced to fight a pitched battle, I might show the white feather; but immediately we joined the troopers on the hill, and found General Marion and Captain Horry waiting for us to come before giving the signal to make a dash, I forgot everything save the desire to wreak vengeance upon those who had captured our city, and done so much to humiliate us.

Then I saw the general raise his hand. It was the signal, and as my fingers tightened on the bridle-rein, the horse beneath me leaped forward eagerly as if burning with the same mad desire that was in my heart! I urged him forward even though he was doing his best, and prayed that it might be my good fortune to show what one boy of South Carolina could do when there came to him an opportunity of avenging the insults which the king's hirelings had heaped upon his people.

CHAPTER IV

DISAPPOINTMENT

STRANGE as it may seem, I am not able to tell what occurred from the time we started on that mad rush down the hill until the redcoats and Tories were fleeing in every direction. The fever of excitement had such a hold upon me that I saw nothing, heard nothing, was conscious only of the desire to strike a blow, and might have discharged my weapon once, or a dozen times without knowing it save for the fact of the bullets in my pouch, which, on being counted later, showed that I had sent but two shots into that red-coated mass which rose up only when we were nearly riding over their encampment, and then dispersed.

I was aroused to distinct consciousness of the surroundings finally, when I heard Gabriel Marion shouting in my ear as if to awaken me from what can be called little less than the delirium of excitement:

"It is for us to find Seth Hastings! Have you seen him yet?"

I was so much ashamed at having lost myself entirely, as it were, that instead of declaring I had seen nothing save that mass of red which seemingly

rose up from the earth, I simply replied in the negative to his question, and Archie Gordon, for it seems that we three lads had ridden closely together during the charge, shouted as he turned his horse around, thus forcing Gabriel and me to do the same:

"He must be among those who are fleeing down the river! If there is any bottom to our horses now is the time to bring it out."

We had simply checked the speed of our steeds on coming to where half a dozen or more shelter-tents had been put up, and hardly a second was lost before we were in pursuit of the terror-stricken enemy.

Then it was I noted that even in the confusion of their surprise both soldiers and Tories had striven to mount their horses, leaving behind them saddles and bridles, for there had been no time to do more than leap upon the backs of the animals and cut the ropes by which they were picketed. It was simply a question as to which side was the better mounted, whether we take prisoners or no, and there was a sense of exultation in my heart as I felt the strong stride of the horse beneath me, telling of the pace which he was setting.

Now, because I am speaking of none save us three comrades, it must not be supposed that we were the only ones in pursuit of the fugitives. Considerably in advance of us I could see General Marion and Captain Horry riding side by side, while at their heels were ten or a dozen men, and

as many more were behind us. Therefore we were not in good position to distinguish ourselves by making any captures, nor indeed did we hope to do so. Seth Hastings was the game we were after, and I question whether we would have turned aside to take so important a prisoner as Major Gainey, if perchance we had seen the traitorous cur who would have consigned us to the prison-ships.

It was a mad race in which was no semblance of military formation on either side, but simply one mob of men pursued by another, riding at hot speed down the bank of the stream regardless of the obstacles in their way, and more than one, venturing too near the water's edge, was pitched out of the saddle as his steed floundered in the mire.

Within five minutes I understood that we were behind in the race. Our steeds were stout and honest, but not blooded; urged by blows and voice they were doing their best, while our leaders were outstripping us swiftly, and a few seconds after this fact had impressed itself upon my mind, old Peter, who had been as eager in the chase as either of us, urged his horse to my side as he said:

"Dar's no sense, honey, in blowin' dese yere horses fur nuffin."

I pushed aside the hand which he would have laid upon my bridle-rein, impatient at the suggestion that I fall out of the race, so great was my desire to catch a glimpse of the lad to whom we owed such a debt, and would have pressed my horse on yet faster but for the fact that just then one of

the troopers who had followed General Marion most closely came riding back as he shouted:

"The orders are to return to the encampment just vacated by the redcoats. Nothing can be gained by further pursuit, and there is a chance that these fellows in advance may be leading us into a trap."

As a matter of course we brought our horses to a standstill, for young in the service as were we Minute Boys, it was well understood that an order from the officer in command must be obeyed on the instant, but Gabriel grumbled as he slipped out of the saddle to loosen the girth:

"It can be no more dangerous for us to go on, than for General Marion. Why should he not fall back and leave those who are of less importance to take the chance of falling into an ambush?"

"The orders are to go back to the camp we surprised," the trooper replied curtly, and then it was I recognized him as one of the bravest defenders of Charleston during the siege. He was an old soldier, and as such had neither sympathy nor patience for lads who would discuss an order which had been given.

It is not necessary I make any attempt at picturing the disappointment we felt because of having failed in capturing or shooting down the traitor who had thus brought the enemy on our trail. Having flattered ourselves that with this surprise of the camp it would be a comparatively simple matter to take Seth Hastings prisoner, one can readily understand the feeling of chagrin amount-

ing almost to shame, which was ours after having failed thus signally.

We were not in a mood for conversation as we wheeled about and moved up the stream at a leisurely pace, and once arriving at the enemy's camping-place came to understand of how much importance this surprise would prove to those who had rendezvoused at Snow's Island. As I have already said, our people were illy equipped, lacking almost everything except horses, and the party who had come in pursuit of us brought with them even luxuries.

In this encampment we found weapons, ammunition, provisions, and horse equipments beyond all expectation, and even those who, like my comrades and myself, were most bitterly disappointed at having been forced to turn back in the chase, forgot for the moment everything except the pleasing fact that in this first adventure the "ragged regiment" had won a most valuable victory, even though they failed in taking a single prisoner.

It was while we were gathering up the spoils preparatory to taking them to Snow's Island that we saw the leaders return, and with them two captives, the sole fruit of the entire race.

Although our people had succeeded in capturing only a couple of men, it soon appeared that, so far as concerned us, the cream of all the mob of fugitives had been taken. They were Tories, and, like many of their breed, such arrant cowards that immediately after finding themselves in the clutches of the patriots, they were willing to tell all they knew,

regardless of the fact that by so doing they were playing the traitor.

It was from these weak-kneed renegades that General Marion gained such information as was in the highest degree valuable, for if he had remained in ignorance regarding the matter, the chances were more than equal that all our little force would speedily have been gobbled up.

Without making too many words of what really deserves to be spun out into a longer story, I must content myself by explaining that the prisoners speedily confessed that somewhere on the banks of the Great Pedee, between where we then were and the ferry at Georgetown, was a large force of Britishers and Tories who had been sent to cooperate with Major Gainey, the plan having been that the latter advance along the Charleston road while this second and greatly superior force come up the river-bank. The report was that the other party could not be less than four hundred strong, under the command of Captain Barfield, a name which we of Charleston would not speedily forget, for he it was who had command of the squad that carried the chief citizens of the city to the prison-ships.

One needed not to be a soldier in order to understand what might have happened had our people continued the pursuit very long.

Those whom we had surprised, knowing of this larger force in the vicinity, were, of course, doing all they might to join them, and most likely hoping we would keep at their heels until finding ourselves

confronted by a company which could speedily overcome us.

The cold chills of fear were creeping up my spine as I thus thought of all the possibilities, and I started like one who suddenly finds himself on the brink of a precipice, when a trooper came up quickly to say to us three lads:

"General Marion would have speech with you, and at once."

"Speech with us?" I said half to myself. "We have done nothing which calls for reproof."

"And why do you fancy we are to be reproved?" Gabriel asked with a laugh as he set about picketing his steed. "Do you suppose that my brother can wish to see us only in order to find fault?"

"But why should he have speech with us? Surely not to ask advice!" I said petulantly, because of my nervousness and disappointment, and Archie Gordon replied with a laugh:

"If you will make ready to obey the summons we shall the sooner know what is required."

Like the simple I was, the summons disturbed me not a little, but when we were come a short distance down the stream where stood Captain Horry and General Marion, the latter greeted us with such a friendly smile that my forebodings speedily vanished, and I began almost to believe that during our mad rush down the hill, when I remained all in ignorance of what was being done because of the excitement upon me, I might have

performed some great deed which was now to be publicly acknowledged.

I mention this fact only to show what a thorough simple I do make of myself at times. When we were approached so near the fire that a conversation could be carried on in a low tone, for it was evidently the intention of the commander that the remainder of the force should not hear what was said, the general spoke.

"You lads have announced your intention of forming an organization to be called the Minute Boys of South Carolina, and I have no doubt you expect to be received as an independent company in whatsoever army you may choose to honor."

I wondered whether he had simply summoned us for the sake of making sport of our intentions, and remained silent, not knowing what to say, but Gabriel replied without hesitation:

"Ay, sir, that is our purpose."

"And as yet you have had no experience as soldiers?"

"Save what we may have gained during the siege," Archie interrupted, and the general added with a smile:

"I question whether that might be of any great value. However, the time has come when you may, if you so desire, prove your claim to enter the army as a distinct organization."

Now it was that I began to have some inkling as to what he was driving at, and gathered myself sufficiently to ask before either of my companions could speak:

"What would you have us do, sir? If we can be of any service at this time, there is no need of overly many words to screw up our courage, for we are minded to do all that boys may, and perhaps a bit more."

"Well spoken, Master Randolph, and it is what I might have expected one of your name would say. Here are the facts, if so be our prisoners have told the truth: Somewhere along the line of the river is a force of perhaps four hundred Britishers — I am inclined to believe the number has been overstated. However that may be, it is my purpose to advance upon them without unnecessary delay; in order to do so with any hope of success I must have some idea as to their position, and that within the shortest possible space of time."

"Meaning that you would send us on the scout, sir?" Gabriel said quickly, his face lighting up with joy.

"Ay, lad, that is exactly my meaning, and it is not necessary for me to tell you how much danger there may be in such a reconnoissance, for those who have joined me here know full well that when men like us undertake to strike a blow at the king's forces in this vicinity, they take their lives in their hands. Are you minded to set off at once?"

"There is no need for such a question, General Marion," I made bold to say. "We came to Snow's Island hoping there might be an opportunity for us to do a soldier's full duty, therefore stand ready to obey any command."

"But in such a case as this, lads, I would not

give a command. He who sets out on the scout with the chances of running full upon an overwhelming force, must go as a volunteer."

"That we are ready to do, sir," Archie replied, and the general added, with a nod of his head as if he had already known what our answer would be:

"Then you are to start without delay. I would not undertake to say how the task can best be performed. The Tories who gave us the information were themselves ignorant of the precise location of Captain Barfield's command, therefore your method of gaining information must be according to the circumstances which arise. Do not burden yourselves with rations or weapons; take only so much as may be necessary to defend yourself from the chance comer, and in the event of being surrounded, surrender quickly rather than sacrifice your lives. As to provisions, sufficient for one meal will be enough, since after breakfast to-morrow morning you will be in another world, with us again, or prisoners among the foe. At noon to-morrow we shall set out at a slow pace down the river, hoping to meet you on the way, and our course will be somewhat with that of the stream, although we may have to enter the woods to the southward of it in order to remain under cover of the timber. That which I want to know is somewhere near the number of the enemy, the general situation of the camp, and, if may be, an approach to it by which a surprise can best be effected. I shall hope to see you before sunset to-morrow, lads."

With this the general turned away, thus showing that he had no further command to give, and I asked myself why he brought the interview to a close so abruptly? Was it because he had no further time to waste upon us, or that he dared not trust himself to say aught which might smack of parting lest he weaken our courage?

We did not speculate many moments as to this last. It was enough for us that we had our work cut out, and most eager were we to be at it.

When, on going back to where we had left our horses, we found the Marshall boys awaiting us, Edward asked eagerly:

"For what were you wanted?" and Gabriel explained in the fewest words possible the purport of the interview, but was not yet come to an end before Joseph began saddling his horse, whereupon Archie asked why he was making ready to move.

"That we may go with you, of course."

"But the orders were given only to us three."

"Yet we have joined you as members of the Minute Boys' company, therefore it is our right to share in whatsoever danger you may encounter," Edward cried hotly, and during the next few minutes we had quite a warm interview.

Finally Gabriel explained that the greater the number who went on the scout the greater the danger, also that it was the general's privilege to select whomsoever he might for the mission, and the lads gave way, although, as I could see plainly, very much to their disappointment.

And thus I ever found it with the boys of South Carolina during those terrible days when the enemy so overrun us as to leave little or no hope as to the future. There was not a lad in the State, save of Tory inclination, who did not grieve when debarred from taking part in some perilous enterprise which might prove of benefit to the Cause.

We had no need to search for provisions, because the redcoats had left food in plenty behind them, therefore when we three had gathered up as much as might suffice for one meal, seen to the equipment of our horses, and the charging of our weapons, we were ready for the work.

No one of our people gave any particular heed to us as we rode slowly away. The fact of our having had an interview with the general was sufficient indication that we had been sent on an enterprise, and I fancy every one knew the purpose of our going.

I confess to feeling exceeding proud, as, leaving our people behind, we three rode out into the night on what must at best be an extremely hazardous adventure, for if the Tories had told the truth, then were we like at any moment, despite all precautions, to come upon a force of the enemy so great that resistance would be folly.

It can well be fancied that we did not indulge in overly many words during the journey, for silence was our best friend at such a time. The raising of our voices in conversation would have been much the same as giving the enemy warning of our approach. Only once did Gabriel speak, and that was

perhaps ten minutes after we left the encampment, when he said half to himself:

"If we had the slightest idea as to how far away this Captain Barfield may be, the work could be done much more quickly."

Neither Archie nor I made reply to this, and indeed there was no necessity, for we recognized the truth of it; not one of us but would have given all of worldly goods he possessed to have known within a radius of two or three miles where the enemy had encamped.

During half an hour more we rode on in almost perfect silence, save for the hoof-beats of the horses, and then, when we were come to the bottom-lands, which were covered with a growth of scrub-oaks, we heard a noise as of a horseman forcing his way through the foliage.

There is no need for me to say that we halted on the instant and unslung our muskets, for we knew by the noise that but one was approaching, and were determined to be the party which should give the surprise.

Silently, hardly daring to breathe, fearing each instant lest the noise from one of the steeds should betoken our whereabouts, we waited in nervous expectancy, never dreaming of that which was coming upon us.

One, two, three minutes passed, and then there rode out from amid the scrub-oaks none other than that traitorous cur, Seth Hastings!

"Halt!" Gabriel cried, and the fellow looked up to see three muskets levelled full upon him.

If I had had time in which to consider the matter, I would have expected to see a look of dismay and fear overspread his face; but much to my surprise the whelp gazed at us, while obeying the command, as if this unexpected meeting gave him the greatest pleasure.

"So you have left Snow's Island, eh?" he asked insolently, before either of us had an opportunity to make answer, but Gabriel said sternly:

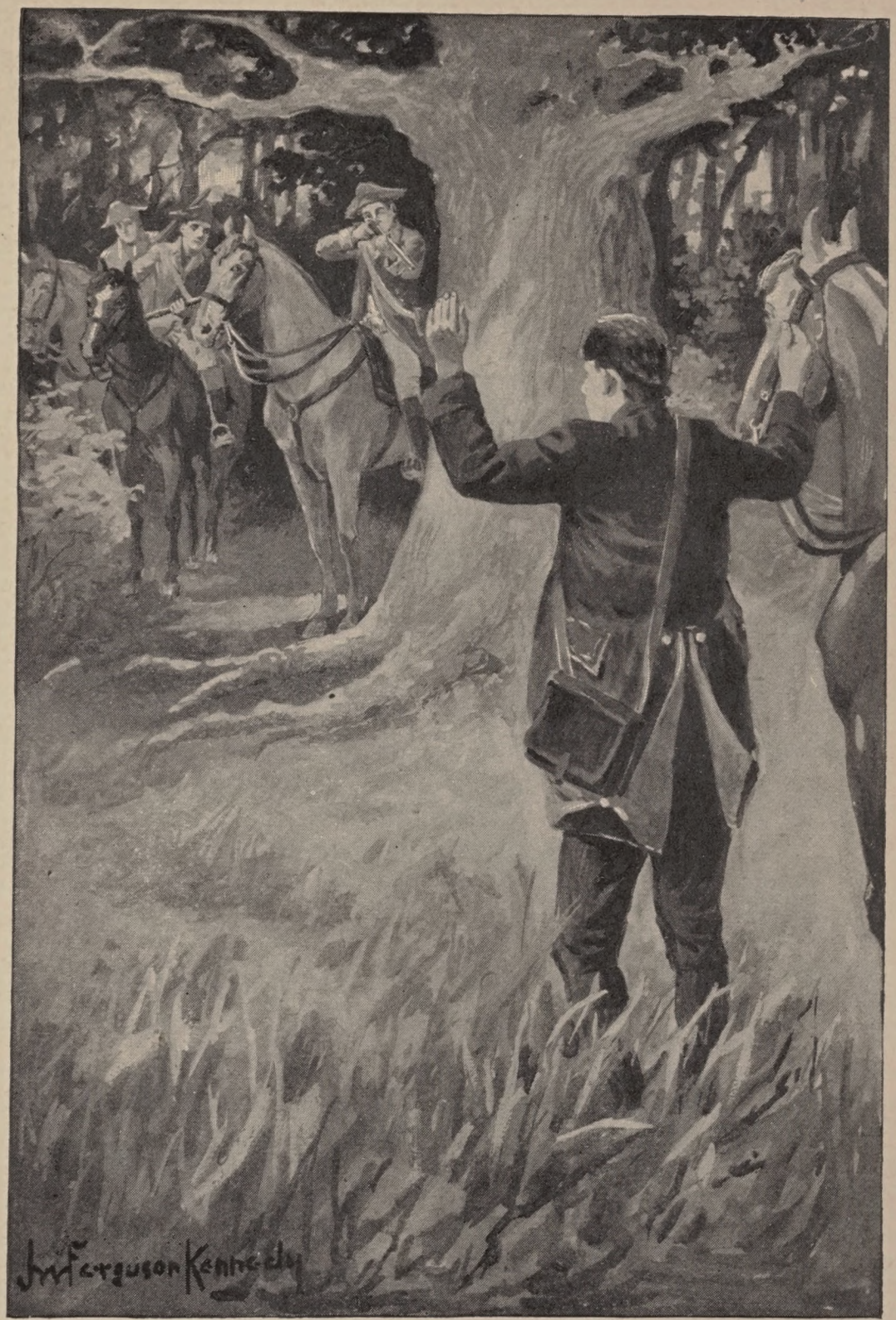
"It makes little difference to a renegade like you where we have come from; dismount and throw down your weapons!"

Seth Hastings obeyed as if there was nothing in the matter to cause him the slightest apprehension, and Gabriel said to Archie as the fellow stood there with uplifted hands anticipating that which was to come:

"Dismount and search the cur; but make certain he strikes you no foul blow, for a boy who will turn tail, when he is one of a party of a hundred or more, to flee in hot haste from only twenty, is cowardly enough to take any wicked advantage."

I could see on the instant that Gabriel Marion had made a grave mistake and at the same time aroused Seth Hastings's anger, for he had unwittingly proclaimed the feebleness of General Marion's force when he taunted the fellow with cowardice, although at the moment it did not seem such a serious matter, because while we held him prisoner there was little opportunity of his repeating the information thus gained.

"There is no need for us friends of the king to



"'DISMOUNT AND THROW DOWN YOUR WEAPONS!'"

exchange shots with you rebels," Seth Hastings cried vindictively while Archie was making thorough search of his clothing for concealed weapons. "The situation of affairs in the Carolinas has changed since you ran away from Charleston, and in four and twenty hours there will not be a rebel left within the borders of the two States."

"Meaning that Captain Barfield's force is going to wipe us all out of existence, or into the prison-ships," Gabriel said with a scornful laugh which still further roused the Tory's ire, and he replied with a hiss which was much like that of an angry cat:

"Meaning that your General Gates with his ragtag, bob-tail of an army has been cut to pieces at Camden by Lord Cornwallis, and there is now left in the Carolinas none to uphold what you have boastingly called the 'Cause,' save those twenty on Snow's Island of whom you speak."

Had he struck me full in the face I could not have been more surprised and angered, yet I knew he must have told the truth regarding the disaster to General Gates, for since we held him prisoner he could be made to answer for any cock-and-bull story which he might invent on the moment.

We three sat speechless with dismay, gazing at each other questioningly, and yet believing what the villain had said.

Unfortunately we soon came to learn that he had exaggerated no part of it. And now right here, in order to show, while Archie is searching and binding the prisoner, in what sore distress were we who

still adhered to the Cause, let me round out his story. General Gates, who was less of a soldier than he believed himself to be, gave battle with raw recruits, on lines formed in a swamp, to the most experienced of the king's soldiers that were in the Carolinas, and one can fancy what would be the result of such a meeting, particularly when, with all other disadvantages, Gates's men had been drawn up in the most awkward place that could have been found.

The battle of Camden had been half-fought and wholly lost, and to us who sat there gazing in dismay and astonishment at the villainous Tory, it seemed indeed that we who had struggled so hard for freedom were at last entirely undone.

Archie Gordon had not allowed this disheartening information to interfere with his duties, and while Gabriel and I were almost entirely overcome by dismay, he had expeditiously searched the prisoner and bound his hands behind his back, asking, after that had been done:

"Where will it please you to have this fellow?"

"Help him to mount his horse, and use your knife if he does not aid himself. Whether General Gates has been defeated or not, we have our work to perform, and it shall be done."

"Meaning that you are minded to find Captain Barfield's camping-place, eh?" Seth Hastings asked in a tone which aroused my anger afresh, although his seemed to have died away entirely. "If it so be that is what you want, I have no hesitation about acting the part of guide."

The impudence and boldness of this proposition struck me dumb; surely the Britishers must be in greater force than we had been led to believe, and nearer at hand, else would he have been less rash, or striven to give us the slip rather than thus propose to show us the way.

Gabriel gave no heed to either the Tory's words or his tone, but said cheerily:

"If it so be you please, we will take advantage of the offer; but remember this, Seth Hastings, if by chance or intention you lead us into an ambush, my first act shall be to blow out your brains."

"I question if he have any," Archie said as he mounted, and Seth replied in a scornful tone:

"It may be I have too many for your purpose. At all events you shall blow my brains out if I lead you into an ambush, and you shall set me free when I have shown you Captain Barfield's force."

"I say 'yes' to the first, and 'no' to the last," Gabriel replied sternly. "You may guide us or not, but we shall proceed."

"Then you have less than half a mile to go," the cur said quietly, and I racked my brain to know what purpose he had in his mind, for surely there must be something which he knew that would work to our undoing.

Gabriel led the way, and Archie and I followed with Seth Hastings riding between us, I carrying my musket over one arm in order to execute the threat which Gabriel had made, if so be there were any signs of fresh treachery.

We rode at a walk five minutes longer, and then

far in the distance was it possible to see the glow of many camp-fires, thus telling that Seth Hastings had indeed done what he proposed, for we were come as straight to the camp as a crow could fly.

Gabriel brought us to a halt with a softly spoken word, and, dismounting, said as he handed the bridle of his horse to me:

"Wait here until I return."

"But surely you are not going alone," Archie Gordon cried in dismay, and I added, following Gabriel's example:

"Indeed he has no need. One is sufficient to guard that Tory cur and look after the horses, therefore I shall go with you, Gabriel."

He made no protest; as a matter of fact I believe he felt relieved rather than otherwise that he was to have company, and after cautioning Archie not to move out of his tracks, since it might be we would have need of coming upon him in a hurry and must know exactly where he was, we started, but before having gone many paces Gabriel wheeled about, saying as he did so:

"We are proving ourselves poor soldiers indeed, if we leave that Tory in such shape that he may be able to raise an alarm in case any of his companions pass by. A bit of a gag in his mouth will do him no harm, and guarantee silence."

Again was I mystified by seeing Seth Hastings peacefully open his mouth for the billet of wood which Gabriel clapped between his teeth, buckling it in place with the cur's own waist-belt. It was

as if all which we did met with the approbation of the scoundrel. This done, once more Gabriel and I turned about to perform the task for which we had been sent.

The work proved easy, although it was not possible to absolutely count the men, who were scattered over quite an area, some sleeping, others playing cards by the camp-fires, and not a few carousing. From a careful estimate both Gabriel and I decided that there were more than four hundred, rather than less, and this information we deemed sufficient for General Marion's needs. As to the location of the camp itself, the troop might come upon it most readily by the same course which we had pursued in our advance, the scrub-oaks on the bottom-lands affording ample cover.

"I see no reason why we should linger here," Gabriel said within five minutes after we had crept up to where a view of the camp-fires could be had, and then we retraced our steps, but although going back as I believed on our own trail, we failed to find either Archie or the prisoner.

There was no thought in our minds that anything had gone awry; first, because we had been absent no more than ten minutes, during which time nothing of a suspicious nature had been heard, and secondly, we felt positive our comrade would have contrived to let us know, either by discharging his gun or shouting, if an attack had been made.

Then we set resolutely at work to find him, blaming ourselves for being stupid, and searched here, there, and everywhere along the bank of the river

above the encampment, until a full half-hour was spent in the fruitless task.

Then, not suddenly, but gradually, was the horrible truth forced upon us. The enemy — surely it could not have been Seth Hastings alone — had captured Archie Gordon, and taken possession of the horses!

CHAPTER V

BARFIELD'S CAMP

NOT until we were come to that portion of the thicket where the moss had been cut and trampled by the feet of the horses, did we see a fallen and curiously twisted oak-tree which proved beyond a peradventure that we were standing in the very spot where we had left Archie and his prisoner. Then we two lads were forced to the conviction that some dire disaster had befallen our comrade.

We stood gazing at each other as though unable to speak, while one might have counted thirty, and then Gabriel asked, as if he neither knew nor had any idea where duty lay:

"What is to be done?"

Before he could say any more I replied hotly, angered because he had questioned as to the course which should be pursued:

"We must search for Archie, and having learned his whereabouts, do what we may toward his escape, for there can be no doubt but that Seth Hastings, being now his keeper instead of his prisoner, will make it as uncomfortable as possible for the poor fellow!"

"That is what we would do, William Rufus, if

we three had come here on our own affairs; but I am asking if we have the right to consider Archie at all in this matter?"

"Why should we not consider him?" I cried passionately.

"For the reason that we shall be untrue to the Cause if, in order to save the life of one, we sacrifice twenty or more, as will be the case if we spend our time searching for poor Archie when we know my brother and his men are riding in this direction depending upon the information which we should give them."

"But would you leave a comrade to be killed, perhaps, for who can say what Seth Hastings will not do, when it may be possible for you to save him?"

"Hark ye, lad," and now Gabriel Marion spoke as a man twice his age might have spoken. "All our efforts are to be for the benefit of the Cause, and it is the same as if we had solemnly sworn it. Now tell me, with Archie on one side, and all our people who have rendezvoused at Snow's Island on the other, which are we to sacrifice? It comes exceedingly near being in our power to say that the troops shall be allowed to tempt death, but at the same time we are not positive any assistance can be given the lad."

"But, Gabriel!" I cried entreatingly, for it cut me to the heart that he should set our comrade aside as he might an entire stranger. "Are we not bound to do all we may toward aiding one of our company, and you know Archie ventured here only that he

might be counted as a member of the Minute Boys? Are we to turn our backs upon him, raising no hand in his behalf?"

"Rufus, you and I have been warm friends since first we could remember, and if you, instead of Archie, had been taken prisoner, and he argued with me as you are doing, I should then say as I say now: Our duty lies in that direction where we may best aid the Cause. The lives of a few boys are not to be compared with those of thirty men. You yourself must admit that the Carolinas can lose us three lads without suffering an irreparable loss, whereas if my brother — and I'm not saying this because he *is* my brother — and those who are gathered around him should be cut off now, then must all hope of resistance to the king's forces in this section of the country be abandoned, at least for a certain time."

"But they may continue on without information from us, and attack the camp with the same result as when they charged down on Major Gainey's force," I cried, and Gabriel answered with a tone of reproof in his voice:

"Now, lad, you know full well that your words are empty ones. We have seen the force here, and I ask what in your opinion would be the result if our people charged this camp as they did the one last night?"

As a matter of course I could do no more than hold my peace, for it went without saying that if General Marion and his followers should attempt any such manœuvre as had been executed a few

hours previous, the chances were as ten to one they would come to grief. This I was forced to admit to my companion, while yet unwilling to leave Archie to his possible fate without having made some effort to aid him, and after a short pause I said with as much of firmness in my tone as it was possible to command at the moment:

"You shall go back and give the necessary information to our people, and I will do what I may hereabout."

"I was afraid you might make some such proposition as that, Rufus Randolph."

"Why were you afraid?" I asked irritably.

"Because it could have no other effect than that of giving Seth Hastings two prisoners instead of one. Recall to memory what we have seen, and then tell me if you believe on your honor that it would be possible for you to effect anything whatsoever toward Archie's release? The only hope — and it would be one chance in ten — is that Seth Hastings remains with his prisoner somewhere outside of the encampment; but that we both know, whether willing to admit it or not, is in every way improbable. The Tory cur, mindful of his own hide, and desiring above all things to keep our comrade in his clutches, would ride at full speed to the Britishers, to show them whose favor he is unquestionably desirous of gaining, that he had been able to capture a scout and three horses. Verily a deed like that would win him some consideration from Captain Barfield, however much that officer might dislike such a traitor as Seth has

shown himself to be. Then again, as a second reason for his seeking the encampment at the earliest possible moment, he would do so for his own safety as well as the proper guarding of the prisoner, because of our being at liberty. However much of a cur that scoundrel may be, you cannot truthfully say he is an idiot."

Now I could not in reason make any further protest, and Gabriel insisted, for his arguments were unanswerable, that unless I was willing to take the chance of working irreparable injury to the Cause, it was necessary to turn my back upon the brave little lad who would have risked every danger in order to aid one of us.

My heart was sore indeed as we set off up the stream, on foot, of course, since we had lost the horses, and the only ray of light which came to my mind in all that distressing situation, was that most probably General Marion would be willing to make an attack upon such an overwhelming number rather than quietly leave one of his recruits in their hands.

"In such a warfare as we of the Carolinas must carry on now in order to hold even a footing in our native State," Gabriel said, "it stands to reason that for a time at least whenever we make a movement, the odds will be heavy against us. Therefore it is I have somewhat of an idea that Captain Barfield's camp will not remain undisturbed to-night. Neither Captain Horry nor General Marion is inclined to count the odds when there is an opportunity to strike a telling blow, and that information

which we can give regarding the number of the force behind us may have weight with those two officers. In which case, unless we are cut down at the outset, you and I may yet be able to raise a hand in behalf of Archie Gordon."

Although there was little hope in my mind just then that our people would do other than give the encampment a wide berth, Gabriel's words soothed somewhat the pain in my heart, and from that moment, until we joined our friends, we ceased to speak of the possibilities, but gave every attention to making the utmost speed, for it was important we should come up with our party as soon as might be.

It yet lacked two hours of sunset when we caught a glimpse of those who were scouting in the advance of the troop, and five minutes later we were telling our story to the commander, giving it in the minutest details, even to the mysterious behavior of Seth Hastings.

To my surprise General Marion gave little heed to that portion of the story which related to the disaster at Camden. I had feared when he learned that most of our troops in the Carolinas had been cut down and dispersed, his first thought would be to secure the safety of those who had joined him; but he brushed the matter aside as if of no consequence as compared with the information we gave concerning the location of the camp. Even the size of the force under Captain Barfield was to him of secondary importance.

Then, our report having come to an end, he said

quietly, as if reading the thoughts of all who were concerned in the capture of Archie:

"At the time you met the traitor he probably knew that in the immediate vicinity were a greater or less number of Barfield's force, and counted that while holding you in conversation they would come up and capture all three. He did not make any objection to being gagged, because of knowing there were so many redcoats around him that he could not long remain undiscovered, and hoped to be able to bag you as well as Archie."

"But the puzzle of it is that we heard no sound betokening a struggle while we crept up to get a view of the encampment," Gabriel interrupted.

"And that is not strange, lad," the general replied. "Most like the redcoats took your comrade entirely by surprise, and thus had no difficulty in preventing him from making an outcry. They had every reason to work quietly, more particularly after Seth Hastings had told them of you. The only mystifying part of the entire story is, that you succeeded in making your escape. How far away is the encampment?"

"Three or four miles," Gabriel replied.

Then it was that General Marion gave word for his "ragged regiment" to dismount, and while the men fed their horses with such corn as had been brought by the party, the commander and Captain Horry stepped aside, evidently for a consultation, whereupon I whispered to Gabriel:

"They are deciding as to whether an attack shall

be made upon the encampment," and he replied with a smile:

"I venture to say, William Rufus, that the question between them is as to *how* it shall be made, for if I mistake not, their countenances, while we were making our report, told that an attack had been decided upon without words."

There was no opportunity for us to discuss the matter just then, for the Marshall boys and old Peter came up, having felt obliged to remain at a distance while we were in conversation with the commander, and insisted on hearing from our lips the strange story.

Gabriel took it upon himself to describe the adventure, and as if thinking one or the other of the listeners might find fault because we had turned our backs upon Archie in his time of danger, the dear lad explained at great length how difficult it had been for him to persuade me to rejoin the general's force.

"We's gwine to have that young Archie out ob de sogers' han's 'fore mornin'," old Peter exclaimed in a tone of conviction, and Edward Marshall laughingly asked him why he was so positive, repeating again that which we had told him as to the number of men under Barfield's command.

"Marse Marion is in de head ob dis yere army," was all the negro thought it necessary to say, and I, who should have known the general better than he, could have kicked myself for doubting when an old servant had such implicit confidence in the bravery and daring of his master.

There was not a trooper in the company who did not feel positive that as soon as night had come we would be struggling with the enemy, and it stands to reason that I could not fail of being convinced when every one around me took it as a matter of course that an attack would be made. Therefore did I consult with my companions — meaning those of us who called ourselves Minute Boys of South Carolina — as to what should be our course of action when we charged the encampment.

"We must ride together, doing whatsoever we may to aid in the general attack, and at the same time giving the greater portion of our attention to seeking out the prisoner and his keeper," Edward Marshall said decidedly, and Gabriel replied with a laugh which had in it nothing of mirth:

"You two lads may be able to take part in the charge; but Rufus and I have no longer horses, therefore must we follow on foot, and I am questioning whether, if the work be cut out as sharply as it was last night, we shall be able to arrive very early in the encounter."

Now, strange as it may seem, until this moment I had not thought of how sadly Gabriel and I would be handicapped in the coming battle, for I believed of a verity there would be a battle, because it was not reasonable to suppose so many men could be put to flight by so small a number as ours, and straightway my hopes, which had been growing, faded away almost to despair, for at that time it seemed as if nothing could be done toward effecting

Archie's release unless I myself had a hand in the matter.

It was while I was thus mentally raging against fortune because our little party did not have with them led horses which might be pressed into service, that I chanced to remember, as if my memory was going back to seek out all of mischief and all of ill luck it could find, that Gabriel had unwittingly revealed to Seth Hastings the number of our force, and immediately I reminded the lad of his slip of tongue, suggesting that, perhaps, if General Marion knew how much of information the enemy might have concerning us, he would be less eager to take the chances of making an attack.

The blood left Gabriel's face as he remembered, on thus being reminded, those unfortunate words, and he said with a tremor as of fear:

"In playing the braggart with such as Seth Hastings I may have compassed the death of these brave fellows! Come quickly, Rufus, and let me confess my fault!"

Then, running at full speed as if every second was precious, he went to where the general and Captain Horry were in consultation, breaking in upon them with a hurried recital of what he had said to Seth.

If I had expected to see Francis Marion give way to anger because his brother had been so injudicious, then was I grievously mistaken, for instead of displaying any impatience, the general said in a quiet tone to Captain Horry:

"As everything has turned, we have good reason

to believe that victory will not be gained as easily in Barfield's camp as at Gainey's. The enemy must know that these lads were sent out as scouts, and with the knowledge of our strength it is not to be supposed we can make much of a fist at frightening them."

"It will not displease me overly much if they stand up against us for awhile," Captain Horry replied, as one would who speaks of matters which are going entirely to his liking. "We cannot get any especial credit for such work as last night's; but if we can hold our own, or more, against an enemy as strong as we shall encounter this night, then much of the fear which the weak-kneed of our people are suffering because of the disaster at Camden will be overcome."

It was on my tongue's end to suggest that twenty could hardly hope to stand up very long against four hundred; but, fortunately, the words were not spoken, and thus I did not again prove myself a simple.

If you ask me whether I felt any fear regarding the coming attack, when we were to be outnumbered twenty to one, I must say "no," and this not because I can be counted a lad of wondrous bravery, but simply for the reason that the desire to release Archie Gordon was so great there was no room in my mind for any other thought. To make this attack was but a means of gaining the end I so ardently desired.

Our people made no other preparation than that of resting and feeding themselves and their horses

until an hour after sunset, and one would have said we were a party of idlers who cared only to pass the time as comfortably as might be; but when the commander and Captain Horry began saddling their horses, the bustle and excitement were decidedly of a warlike nature.

Old Peter proposed to carry me, during the short march, behind him on the saddle, and one of the troopers who bestrode a heavy beast afforded like service to Gabriel. Therefore we were not forced to lag in the rear during this march, which was made at a slow trot until having arrived at a point which Gabriel and I believed was not more than a mile from the encampment.

Then it was that we were halted, and our commander said, speaking in a low tone and yet so clearly that all could hear him:

"You already understand what may be expected when we strike the enemy. You know quite as well as I how important to the cause it is that we should come off victorious in whatsoever attempt is made just at this time. If you would save your own lives you must fight as you never did before, and if you would free your country, there must be in your hearts no fear of death."

It was not so much the words, as the tone in which they were spoken, that thrilled me. Every nerve in my body was aquiver with excitement as I, in obedience to Captain Horry's gesture, slipped off from old Peter's horse and made ready to follow as best I might in the mad charge so soon to be made.

"You two lads shall not be handicapped by arriving too late," General Marion said as if conferring upon us some great favor. "We will wait here ten minutes while you are advancing, and if it so be no obstacles are found in your way, you should be ready to join us in the attack."

His was a thoughtfulness which touched me deeply, for it is not often that a man eager to win renown as a champion of his country's cause, overburdened by that desire, stops to realize the sorrow a lad may feel because he is not allowed an opportunity of showing whether he can do full duty as a soldier. I vowed then, while I pressed forward by the side of Gabriel, who was advancing at his best pace, that however sorely fortune might buffet me, so long as Francis Marion remained at liberty to march against the enemy, so long would I follow him while I might.

Although Gabriel pushed forward rapidly, we were by no means careless. Not minded to lose our opportunity by coming across any of the enemy who might overpower us before the work began, we took due heed to everything around, and within the time set were hidden among the bushes less than forty yards from the nearest camp-fire belonging to the redcoats, our muskets charged, the ammunition where it could be got at most readily. Our ears were strained to catch the faintest sound which would tell us of the approach of those gallant men whose coming we awaited with breathless expectancy; I speculating, without thought of fear, how-

ever, as to how long our small number might stand before so great a force.

Then, far in the distance, I heard the muffled footfalls of the horses, and whispered to Gabriel:

"They are coming!"

"Ay, lad," he said cautiously. "Now we will rise to our feet and be ready to join them as they come on, for I am not minded to bring up the rear at such a time."

It was as if he had hardly more than spoken when there came a mighty trampling noise, as though on the instant all our people had spurred their horses forward, and I saw by the gleam of those fires in front of me men rising up quickly here and there, showing they had been awaiting some such warning, until it seemed to me a full regiment was waiting to oppose us.

After that there was no time for me to take in the details of this or that portion of the encampment, for Gabriel and I were running immediately behind the leaders, he having seized the tail of Captain Horry's horse and I clinging to the general's stirrup, until we were in the very midst of the enemy; muskets spitting fire; bullets whistling here and there; and with the pungent odor of burning powder filling one's nostrils until the fever of battle was overpowering — until one was become as a machine, and yet a machine formed with the deadly purpose of taking human life.

I remember dimly that Peter, while I was loading and discharging my weapon with careful aim as rapidly as possible, rode up and insisted that I take

his horse, claiming he could fight better on foot, and indeed the old fellow was doing his full share of the desperate work.

I refused the offer, giving no reason, but knowing that my aim would be better on the ground than in the saddle, and then came the knowledge that Gabriel Marion was pressing as closely to my side as he might, whereupon, when I moved as if to give him more room, he said grimly:

"Let us stand together, lad, for if it so be we get a glimpse of our comrade, or of that churlish Seth Hastings, it is needed that we act in concert."

One more picture of that battle in the night still dwells in my memory, and it was presented when the Marshall boys, halting their horses by the side of Gabriel, leaped hurriedly to the ground and began firing at the redcoats as coolly as if engaged in a trial of skill, whereupon I said:

"Why do you not keep in the saddle that you may follow our people?" and Edward replied with a laugh which had in it no tremor of fear:

"Are we not Minute Boys of South Carolina as well as you, and shall we separate at the very moment when there is opportunity of showing what our company may do?"

However dire had been the danger, I must have laughed at that moment, when he spoke of us four boys as representing the company which we hoped would some day win renown, and yet the lad was right in telling us to stand together, for, without in any way thinking to take praise to myself, we did on that night make such a name for the company

yet to be formed as brought to us more recruits than we had anticipated even in our wildest dreams.

I know not how it may be with others, but as for me, once the fumes of powder are in my nostrils, and the angry buzzing of bullets sounds in my ears, I lose consciousness, so to speak, even as I did on this night when I loaded and discharged my weapon until the barrel of the musket was hot, so that it burned my hands. I was wondering what must be the result when the gun was no longer in condition for use, but was interrupted in my speculations by a wild cry from Gabriel, as he seized my arm and rushed forward in what seemed to be the very thick of the fray, where were horses and men in one confused tangle.

"See! Yonder is Seth Hastings dragging Archie to cover!"

Then for the first time did my heart sink within me, because the cur of whom he spoke, with our comrade in his power, was on the other side of the encampment. Between them and us were both friend and foe, and it seemed absolutely certain we must plunge straight into death if any attempt to reach them was made.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESCUE

JUST for a moment as we stood there in the midst of the battle, for such indeed it was, did I believe it would be impossible for us to aid Archie, howsoever eager we were to do so, and this same thought must have been in the minds of my comrades, for Gabriel shouted as if to arouse our courage:

"We should be able to make our way around the combatants! Our people are holding their own despite the heavy odds, and I believe we may leave them to do all the work since we are shirking the fight for the purpose of rescuing a prisoner."

"We can still be taking good part in the battle while making a change of position," Edward Marshall added, as if he thought it necessary to argue me into the mood for going to Archie's aid.

Even while making reply I glanced around, able now to take in the details of the scene as I had not done before, for this brief conversation had aroused me, so to speak, from the fever born of battle.

Our people were indeed holding their own, and more. The enemy had made a stand nearabout the centre of the encampment, and although one might

have supposed that four hundred men would keep in check twenty, we had driven them beyond the southernmost camp-fire — that is to say, we were really in possession of their night quarters.

Perhaps, in order that he who reads may not have the idea I am drawing the long bow for the purpose of praising our people to the disparagement of the enemy, it may be necessary to state what we fully realized at the time. It was that the advantage had been on our side from the outset, since our coming was so much of a surprise that a certain number of the redcoats were illy prepared for the encounter. Then again, they were unable, just coming from sleep, to see as distinctly as we who had been riding through the darkness, and these things, taken into consideration with the fact that it was not to be expected that men who fought for money, as did the king's troops, would do as valiant battle as those who were defending their homes and their loved ones, explains why we were able to do all we did.

As I have said, we had driven the enemy beyond his line of encampment, and in obedience to the commands of the British officers the redcoats stood in line of battle, not breaking the formation when they gave way before us; while we fought Indian fashion, from behind tree, rock, or tent, so that we were sheltered from view. Thus it was our bullets went straight to the mark, while theirs were fired at random.

Our people, and by this I mean the men under General Marion's command, already having forced

their way through the camp, were now in such position that their backs were toward the river-bank, and the redcoats stood in battle array at the edge of the swamp, while we lads who had come into the combat on foot were midway between our friends and the right end of the enemy's line.

Having thus explained the position as well as is possible for one new to such work, that the suggestion, perhaps I should call it a command, which Gabriel gave may the better be understood, I now set down that which he said after having taken in all the details of the situation:

"By falling back twenty paces we shall be screened by yonder line of bushes, and will try to make our way to the rear of the king's men slowly, firing as we circle around that it may appear as if reinforcements were coming up."

Having said this, he set the example, and in a few seconds we were carrying out his commands, taking good aim as we discharged our muskets; then advancing behind the screen of bushes while we reloaded, and stopping again only long enough to send in another volley of bullets, until we were come to the very edge of the swamp directly in line with the redcoats.

Now lest it seem by the many words which I have set down that this battle was being carried on a very long while, let me say that from the time our people opened fire until we lads had gained the position of which I have spoken, less than ten minutes had passed.

Our aim was to gain the place where we had seen

Seth Hastings, and to do this it would be necessary to pass directly across the rear of the enemy's line, by traversing a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile straight through the swamp, and even Gabriel hesitated to lead us along this treacherous footing.

"We may find ourselves mired before going very far," I ventured to say as we hesitated a single instant before making the attempt, and the dear lad replied in a tone of encouragement:

"It can be no worse for us than for the redcoats. If we are unable to advance, surely they cannot fall upon us."

Then once more he led the way, and we followed, speedily to find ourselves floundering in mud nearly waist-deep, making such a racket that but for the noise of the firing the enemy must have heard and supposed a full company of men were endeavoring to make their way over the bog.

It was not possible we could continue such a laborious advance for many seconds without stopping to take breath, and when we were forced to halt Edward Marshall bent back the bushes until we could see the rear rank of that red-coated line. Then we discovered that they were scurrying to the left in the hope of gaining the river-bank, thus showing that they did not hope to cross the swamp.

The temptation was too great to be resisted, and Gabriel raised his weapon as a signal that we should fire at the targets before us.

There was no reason why we could not take careful aim, and at the first volley it was possible to see the line of scarlet waver, thus showing that the fire

from the rear had struck terror into the hearts of a score or more.

"Give it to them once again," Gabriel whispered, hurriedly reloading his weapon, and we did more than obey the command, for three volleys were fired before we changed position. By that time, to our intense surprise and delight, had been effected a wondrous change in affairs.

The redcoats must have believed, as indeed they had good reason, that reinforcements had come up in the rear. The smoke of our third volley had not cleared away before we heard a ringing shout from near the river-bank, and saw that line of red broken here and there as the soldiers fled in a panic.

Verily we lads had done good work for the Cause that night, and yet in accomplishing so much did it appear as if we had defeated our purpose, for with the enemy in hot flight there was no possibility of our creeping around to the left of the line in order to aid Archie.

"We have destroyed the last hope for the poor lad!" I cried as the result of the victory was thus forced upon me, and there was a tone of sorrow in Gabriel's voice even though his words rang out triumphantly:

"We have done more than could have been accomplished had a hundred men joined the general's force, for even then the odds would have been in favor of the enemy, while now they are fortunately ignorant of how many may be in their rear."

I heard the voice of General Marion as he urged

his men to spur their horses hard in order that they might slay or capture the fugitives before they could reach the shelter of the forest which lay between the river and the swamp, and I dragged myself as rapidly as possible over the mire to solid ground in order to join in the chase, but feeling as sore at heart as if we had suffered defeat instead of having won a signal victory.

We lads had no opportunity to take part in the chase. The horses of the enemy were picketed near the bank of the river, as we soon learned, and toward them the fugitives were making their way. By the time we Minute Boys came up the greater number of the redcoats were riding away hotly pursued by our people, and we were left helpless spectators of a most terrible scene. It was as if here, there, and everywhere could be seen blotches of red, even amid the gloom, which told of the dead and wounded, for the fire of our people had been most effective.

I had seen scores of men shot down during the siege of Charleston, but at such times there were many near at hand to care for them, and the evidences of the conflict were speedily borne away. Here all the disabled remained where they had fallen, and the cries for help, mingled with moans of pain, were most distressing.

We lads forgot that those who called upon us were enemies; forgot everything save the need of ministering to the poor creatures who had fallen under our own fire.

A British soldier near where I had halted was

begging for water, and it must have been the cry of delirium, for the fever of thirst could not have fastened upon him so strongly as appeared to be the case, in so short a time. I did not stop to think of this, but ran with all speed toward the river, bent on relieving as much of war's cruelty as lay within my power; but on gaining the edge of the stream I came full upon a man who was bending over another as if robbing him. In a twinkling I had halted and pressed my musket against the fellow's head, when, greatly to my surprise, up rose none other than old Peter, who cried in a tone of relief as he recognized me:

"Look yere, Marse Randolph, don' you see wha' I done gone found?"

It was Archie, who lay upon the ground bound! When I came up Peter was trying to remove a gag from his mouth! It can readily be supposed how quickly my sorrow turned to rejoicing, and I plied the dear fellow with questions while aiding old Peter in his task, although it was impossible for him to make answer until the belt which held in place the wad of grass had been unbuckled.

"Tell me about it, lad, as soon as you are in a condition to speak. How did that Tory cur chance to leave you here? I had sooner thought he would have put a bullet through your head."

"And perhaps he might if our people had not come up so quickly," Archie replied, speaking with difficulty because his jaws were numb and cramped from having been held open so long by the cruel gag.

Before he could say more a wounded man lying close at hand cried out piteously, begging for us to drag him to the water's edge where he might bathe his shattered limb, and we set about the task, working as tenderly, I am glad to say, as if he had been one of our comrades. From that time until near daybreak, we who called ourselves the Minute Boys of South Carolina acted the part of nurses, not only among those of our own people, six of whom had been wounded and one killed, but toward the enemy.

Archie did his full share of the work, and I question if any of us lads knew when General Marion and his followers came back to camp, further pursuit being impossible because of the darkness, and the thick undergrowth into which the fugitives had ridden.

Not until the wounded on both sides had been cared for to the best of our poor ability did we have time to look about the encampment, and then we learned that here, as at the last engagement, the foe had left behind him plunder of all kinds; so much that when once it was carried to Snow's Island we would have sufficient to outfit as many of our people as might answer the general's summons.

In addition to the camp equipment, provisions, and ammunition which had thus come into our possession, we had a large number of horses which the troopers gathered in as they returned from the chase — twenty-eight all told, I believe. Before setting about getting breakfast we three lads selected from the animals such as pleased our fancy,

Captain Horry having given word that we were to make our choice.

Then we sat down in front of the fire to toast bacon and bread while we made a plentiful supply of coffee, helping ourselves generously from the stores which the panic-stricken soldiers of the king had left behind.

Not until this moment did we have opportunity to hear Archie's story, and the lad told it in few words, since indeed it could not be spun out to any length, because of the fact that he had spent the greater portion of the time bound and gagged, unable to see what was going on about him.

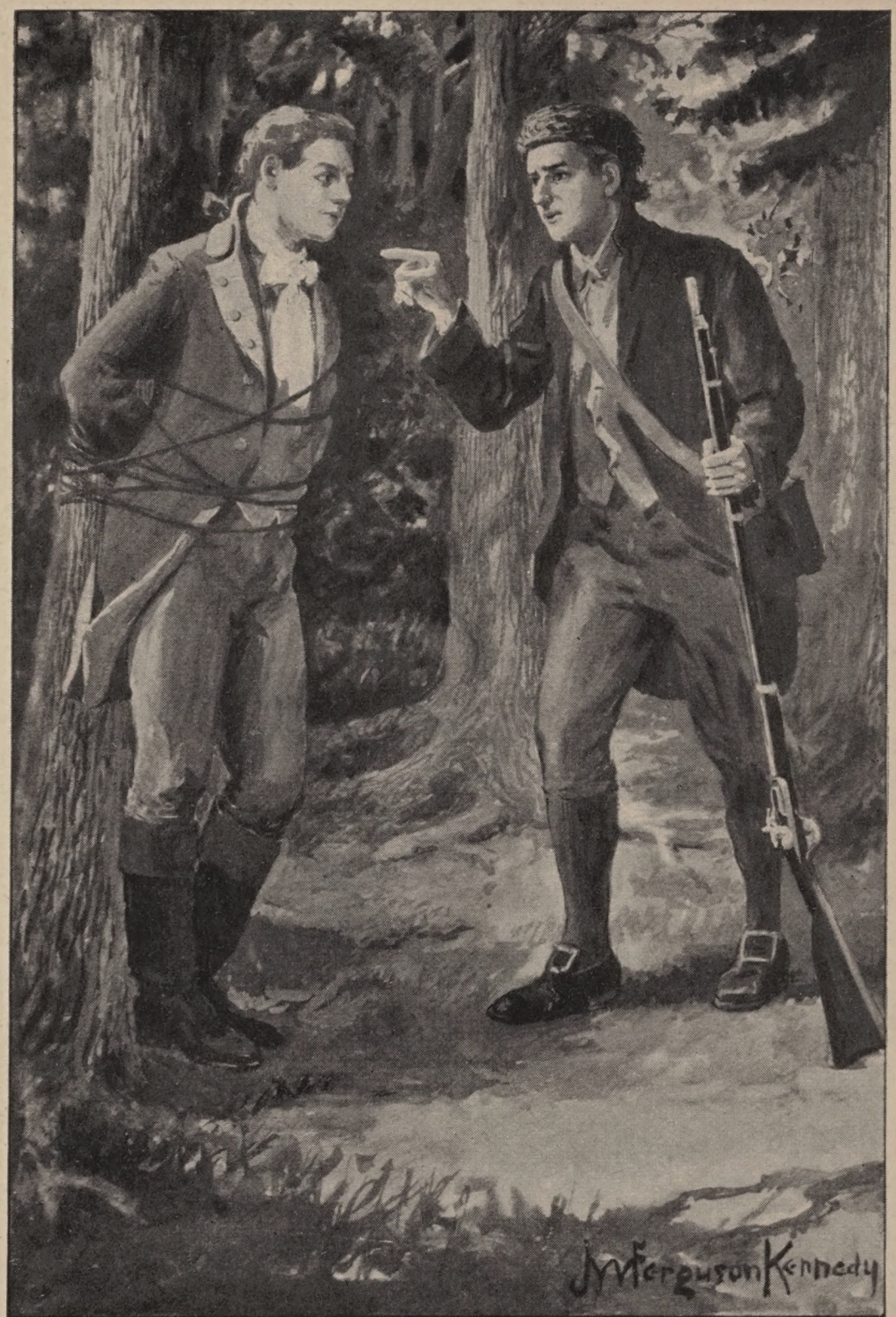
It seems that within five minutes after we left him in charge of the horses, four men came through the woods directly upon him and his prisoner. Even at the very instant he was about to cry out a warning to us, one of the troopers caught him by the throat. Seth Hastings was set free, as a matter of course, and when he told these men that we had gone to spy out the camp, one of them was sent to the rear with Archie and the horses, while the others followed us. The poor lad felt positive we would be captured, for escape seemed impossible, but as the moments went by and no more prisoners were brought in, his hopes grew high.

"I knew that I should not remain long with those troopers if you lads were at liberty," he said confidently, "and therefore counted on a speedy deliverance, unless peradventure Seth Hastings shot me offhand, as I make no question the cur would have done had he dared. Even while I was

being led by a roundabout way to the encampment he would have struck me, but that the soldier threatened direst punishment if he dared lift his hand against a prisoner, and the villain was too much of a coward to do other than obey."

Once in the encampment, Archie was taken before Captain Barfield, who did not think it necessary to spend overly much time on him after asking for what purpose he had come. The lad could do no less than tell the truth, for Seth Hastings had already been made aware of the strength of our people, and also knew that Gabriel and I had crept forward for the sole purpose of learning the strength and position of the enemy.

"I was triced up to a tree, but not in any barbarous fashion," Archie continued, as he made a fresh attack upon the redcoats' bacon, "and if it had not been for Seth Hastings I should have considered myself exceedingly fortunate; but that miserable whelp, who was aching to maltreat me but not daring to raise a hand, spent his time picturing what would be the fate of our people once they were so foolish to make an attack upon such a large force of well-drilled soldiers. It was not that I believed the fellow, or that he frightened me, but you well know how annoying the buzz of a mosquito is, and how disquieting the rattle of a snake. Therefore you can understand that the time was not passed pleasantly by me. I firmly believed you fellows would come shortly after night had set in, but must confess that I had little faith in the ability of our people to overcome so strong a company."



" IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR SETH HASTINGS, I SHOULD HAVE CONSIDERED MYSELF EXCEEDINGLY FORTUNATE."

"Then you were not gagged all this while?" I asked, and he replied:

"Not until the first alarm was given, and then Seth Hastings himself was the one who did the deed, thrusting a bunch of grass into my mouth even at the moment when I opened it, hoping by the sound of my voice you would know where I was. Then he unloosed me from the tree, trussing me up as you have seen, with the intention, I believe, of dragging me so far away that he could work his will without fear of the consequences. In fact, he did give me a few hard blows; but I was so excited by the noise of the battle, so fearful lest you would not come off victorious, that he might have inflicted double punishment without my being aware of what he was about."

We lads were yet around the camp-fire satisfying our hunger and curiosity at the same time, when, shortly after break of day, orders were given for all hands to set about making ready for the march. It seemed to be understood without question that we were to retreat to Snow's Island, for the double purpose of carrying there our plunder, and gaining a place where we could better resist an attack, for unless these soldiers of the king were arrant cowards they would soon recover from the panic into which we had driven them, and return to make reprisals.

Every horse was loaded with as heavy a burden as he could carry, and so also were the men. Even then we were forced to leave behind much which

might have been of greatest value to those who were struggling for the Cause.

There was not one among us, save the officers themselves, who did not believe we would spend the night on Snow's Island, therefore great was our surprise when, after a march of about two hours, we were halted, and three members of the company told off to take charge of the plunder and spare horses.

While we were looking at each other wondering what could be the reason for such an odd proceeding, the command was given that each man, save the three already spoken of, was to take from the general store as much of provisions for himself, and provender for his horse, as would suffice during eight and forty hours, all of which was to be packed behind the rider in the most convenient form for carrying.

This done, the company, with the exception of those who had been detailed to camp service, was sent forward at a leisurely pace southward, making no further halt until the sun was high in the heavens, when we were come to a ford on the Black River six or seven miles south of Kingstree.

Here it was announced that men and horses would be allowed a rest of an hour. General Marion and Captain Horry, as if incapable of feeling fatigue, rode ahead nearly due west, leaving us alone.

"What is the meaning of this?" I asked while unsaddling my horse that his back might be washed,

and Gabriel replied with a laugh which had in it considerable of satisfaction:

"I am of the opinion that our commander does not intend to sit still and gloat over his laurels."

"Meaning that he counts on striking another blow at once?" Archie asked in surprise.

"Ay, lad, that is what I think he will do. Francis ever believed that in warfare the weaker army should be constantly the aggressor so far as possible, and he is, if I mistake not, now simply carrying out his own theory as to how it may be possible for raw recruits, who love their country, to worst a superior force."

I was by no means averse to aiding in such a plan; but it appeared to me that if we were thus to ride to and fro over the country, alternately fighting and running away, the chances of recruiting the ranks of the Minute Boys would be slight indeed. I had counted that we might be able to go here and there where we knew certain lads lived, and thus enlist them; but it looked just then as if our party of five was to constitute the entire strength of the Minute Boys of South Carolina.

Shortly before the expiration of the time set for the halt, General Marion and Captain Horry returned, and when next we advanced it was in the direction they had scouted. We rode at a fairly good pace until arriving at the road leading from Georgetown to Nelson's Ferry, and then I began to have an inkling of what was our purpose in this section of the country.

It is well known that the "war-path" from

Charleston to Camden crosses the Santee River at Nelson's Ferry, and there above all other places would one who was eager for fight be likely to get his fill.

In order to avoid dwelling too long on what others may consider unimportant details, I have said nothing regarding this day's march, but must set down the fact that more than once during the ride had we learned from white men and negroes who remained true to the Cause, additional particulars concerning the blunder of General Gates, and before arriving at the Georgetown road we understood beyond a peradventure that the story told by Seth Hastings was only untrue in so far as it did not contain all the disaster which had befallen the American army.

Now we knew how many prisoners had been taken during the much-to-be-regretted engagement, and, what was more to the purpose, learned that our unfortunate countrymen were being sent as rapidly as possible from the scene of the one-sided conflict to Charleston.

While we were riding along the highway, Gabriel, Archie, and I side by side with the two Marshall boys, and old Peter directly in our rear, a sudden thought came to my mind, and turning in the saddle, I asked:

"Are you lads well acquainted with the country hereabout?" and Edward Marshall replied:

"It is as familiar as our own plantation."

"Then tell me, if those troopers whom we stirred up last night did not recover courage sufficient to

come back in search of us, where would they be most like to go?"

"Nelson's Ferry is the only place I can think of as at all likely."

"You are hitting the truth closely," Gabriel said as if it were possible to read my thoughts.

"But of what was I thinking?" I asked laughingly.

"As to why we are going to Nelson's Ferry."

"In that you are wrong, lad. I asked our comrade where those whom we whipped last night would be most likely to go, because with them rides Seth Hastings, unless they have grown weary of such a traitor as he, and it is that same cur I am aching to meet once more. It would pain me much to know we were riding directly away from where it may be possible to come upon him."

"He had already gone out of my mind, so intent was I upon the errand which it seems probable we are bent on," Gabriel said thoughtfully. "I believe we shall be led to better work than that of punishing a dirty traitor."

"Now, what mean you?" I asked irritably, for it was to me as if the lad tried to speak riddles.

"We have already learned that the prisoners which Lord Cornwallis took are being sent to Charleston as rapidly as possible, and you know as well as do I that they must cross the river at Nelson's Ferry. Therefore am I believing that it is our commander's purpose to do whatsoever he may toward freeing those unfortunates, and in such work he will be striking another blow at the enemy."

On the instant my desire for revenge was forgotten. I no longer felt conscious of fatigue, and would have cried out against our making a halt just then, even though but a few moments before I had been hoping the word to camp for the night might be given. To have a hand in the freeing of those who had been captured through a blunder — even though it can be called by no worse name — of their commander, was sufficient to set all my nerves a-tingle, and I hoped fervently that Gabriel was not mistaken in his guessing.

We who called ourselves Minute Boys were yet eagerly discussing the possibility which had suddenly presented itself, when one of the troopers came riding back from the front, and drawing rein on approaching us lads, said:

"The general would speak with you."

"With whom?" I asked quickly, believing some one was needed for an especial service, and fearing lest Gabriel might have been signalled out for the honor, leaving us behind.

"The word was sent to the lads, and since you five are all the youngsters we have with us, I'm counting you're the ones the commander meant," the man said with a smile, as he turned his horse and spurred forward again.

"The Minute Boys may not count for much in the way of numbers, but surely it seems as if there was work for them to do in this kind of warfare," Archie cried gleefully, and one would have thought, as he urged his horse forward, eager to gain the advance over Gabriel and me, that some great prize

awaited him, instead of what might be a mission which would end with his death.

There was not much of military stiffness in this "ragged army" of General Marion's, and we lads rode up like a party of schoolboys until coming abreast of the general, when we reined in familiarly by his side, but without halting. He welcomed us with a smile and a nod, heeding not the fact that we had failed to salute properly, and said in a brotherly tone:

"We should be near about twenty miles from Nelson's Ferry."

"Well?" cried Gabriel eagerly as the general ceased speaking.

"Perhaps you have already guessed our destination, and I am telling you nothing new when I say that probably early to-morrow morning there will be many men from Cornwallis's army cross at the ferry with American prisoners. Now it is important I should have early information of such movements, and to that end have sent for you lads, because, small though this company is, it would awaken suspicion in the minds of the Tories living near about if we should be seen, whereas you lads would not be so likely to attract attention."

"When are we to start, sir?" Archie cried joyously, not waiting for the command to be given, and General Marion continued, heedless of the interruption:

"Any force coming from Camden will make certain halt nearabout the ferry. I propose that this troop go into camp within an hour, and that you

ride on along the river-bank, keeping under cover as much as may be, until discovering the approach of the enemy. Then you are to wait only so long as may be necessary to learn how strong he is in numbers, before riding back to Tar Heel Creek, on the first bend of which we shall be encamped. You know the place, Gabriel? It is where we have often slept while hunting."

"Shall we set off now, sir?" I asked, tightening my horse's rein.

"There is no reason why you should not ride with us so far as we are counting on going, and when word to halt is next given you are to continue on without making unnecessary show of having been sent on a mission."

We all understood this to mean that it was not well the remainder of our force should know exactly what we were about, and I set the example of saluting him as a soldier should his commander, after which we fell back to our proper places in the line, our hearts beating high with excitement and hope, for it seemed probable we might not only be able to free some of our people who were being driven like sheep into the prison-ships, but at the same time strike a blow for ourselves upon that traitorous cur, Seth Hastings.

CHAPTER VII

NELSON'S FERRY

EDWARD and Joseph Marshall were in high glee at thus being allowed to undertake a mission of danger, or as they themselves put it, "were feeling right well satisfied because commands had been given to the Minute Boys as if they were in truth an independent company."

"Take care not to be too careless in your gratification," Gabriel said warningly, "else are you like to advertise among the men that which it appears to me the general intended should be kept secret."

"What harm would come if they suspected that we were going out on a scout?" Joseph asked quickly.

"That I am not able to say; but certain it is we should try our best at doing what the commander wishes. Otherwise might we interfere with his affairs."

I saw, or fancied I did, that the Marshall boys were disgruntled whenever Gabriel gave them advice. Not having become thoroughly well acquainted with the dear lad, they seemed to have an idea he was reading them a lesson, when in truth he was speaking as one boy to another.

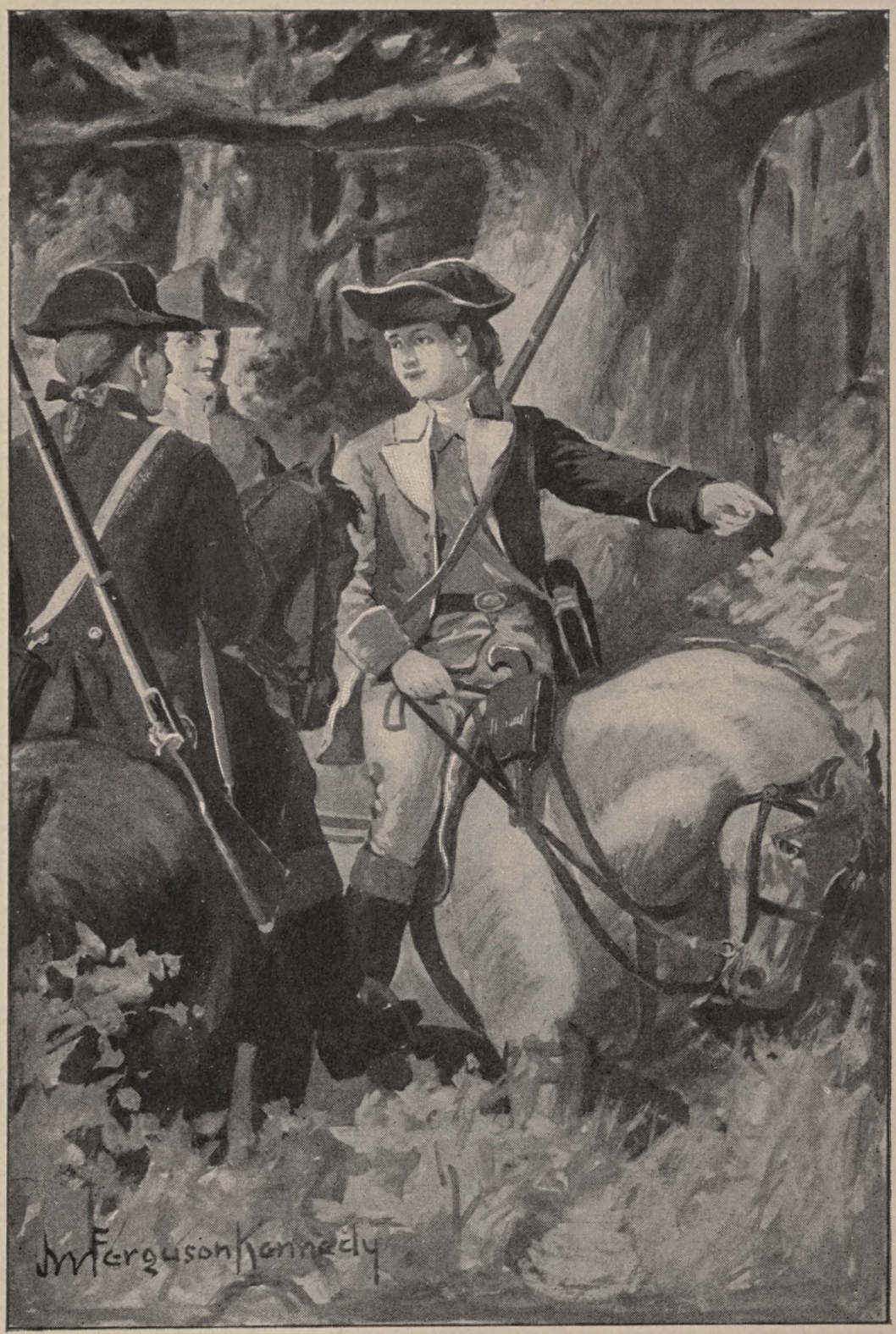
Therefore did I change the subject of conversation, by idly questioning as to how near General Marion proposed to advance toward the ferry without halting.

My attempt was successful, for straightway the Marshall boys began discussing the possibility of our being able to liberate any of the prisoners, and this was a subject which we could dwell upon without fear of exposing the plans as set down by the general.

The company rode, as nearly as I could judge, for an hour more, and then we Minute Boys continued on, when the "ragged army" was halted, much as if we had not heard the order. Now once more does it seem necessary I should review the position of affairs, so far as concerns this body of men with whom we had joined fortunes.

It was true we might strike a signal blow in the vicinity of Nelson's Ferry, thereby releasing a greater or less number of those who would be taken to the horrible torture of the prison-ships but for our intervention. Yet he who reads should remember that ours was probably the only armed force within the Carolinas which remained true to the Colonies; then bear in mind that the Britishers overran our land even as did the locusts of old, and say how might a small squad like ours oppose those which the king had sent against us.

Surely for us of the Southern Colonies, this night, when we five set out to spy upon the victorious troops coming down from Camden with our friends as prisoners, was the most desperate for the Cause



"'I PROPOSE THAT WE HALT HERE.'"

ever known. We were beaten, hemmed in, and like rats in a corner, could only make one desperate fight, not against death, but simply as proof that our courage held good even until the last moment.

When we passed General Marion and Captain Horry at the head of the column, both sat their horses motionless as statues, looking neither to the right nor the left, but each, as it were, peering into the recesses of his own heart, asking in what manner the end would come. It seemed to me as if we were taking final leave of them; as if this parting was to be the last.

More than that I saw nothing, and five minutes later, that little handful of Carolinian patriots, tried and true, were left behind, while we five lads rode forward, hoping against hope that it might be possible for us to accomplish something toward showing the British king how strong in our hearts was the desire for liberty.

Our horses, jaded by the long march of the day, went forward slowly, and we had not the heart to spur them on, because it was much as if they shared our feelings.

I believe we were about midway between where our people had halted and Nelson's Ferry, when Gabriel reined in his horse as he said, with the air of one who even while speaking is taking counsel with himself:

"I propose that we halt here. Surely the beasts must be in good condition when it becomes necessary for us to return with an account of what has been done, and now I question whether we could

keep them at a trot an hour longer. We shall all be the better for the work in hand if we rest until an hour past midnight."

He had started off at right angles with the highway while speaking, we following perforce, and when the road was hidden from view by the foliage, he stopped once more.

A better place for camping could not have been found. A tiny brook ran through a grove of pines where the underbrush was so dense as to form ample hiding-place as well as shelter from the dews of night. There was little green feed for the horses; but we carried a goodly store of grain on our saddles, and, heedless of the possible necessities of the future, which seemed so dark, we allowed the tired steeds to eat their pleasure from the store. Such food as we had, and it was, as I have already said, that which we took from the enemy's camp, we ate, and then, lame and sore in every joint from the long hours in the saddle, laid ourselves down for perchance the last sleep on this earth.

There was no desire for conversation; even the Marshall boys, overjoyed as they had been at being allowed to take part in the work of danger, appeared to have come to a realization of all this scout might mean for us, and had ceased to speculate upon what it might be possible for us to do.

My eyes were closed in slumber within two or three minutes after I was thus stretched at full length upon the bed of pine-needles, and it seemed as if I had slept several hours when something — I know not what — awakened me.

There was no movement on either hand, and even the light of the stars did not penetrate the thicket; yet I could see that the horses were lying down; that my comrades were wrapt in slumber, and it puzzled me to make out why I was thus wakeful.

Then, turning my head for no other reason than to make a change of position, I saw what appeared to be the reflection of a camp-fire through the underbrush. When one knows that he is surrounded by enemies, the slightest thing out of the ordinary arouses his suspicions, and although this gleam of light was so faint that at another time I would have given no heed to it, now it seemed absolutely necessary I should understand the cause.

Rising cautiously to my feet lest I disturb the tired lads around me, I was on the point of advancing, even while saying to myself that I had grown over-suspicious, when suddenly there came between my eyes and the tiny flame three dark figures.

Only at this sign of danger did I realize that I had arisen without taking up the weapon which lay by my side when I fell asleep, and to correct such unsoldierly oversight I turned to get my musket, at the same time laying my hand over Gabriel's mouth that he might not make an outcry as I awakened him.

The dear lad struggled to rise on the instant, pressing my hand to show that he understood danger of some kind was near at hand, and as I released him he sprang lightly to his feet, musket in hand.

Then, before I could pick up my gun, there came

on the still air a cautious hiss like unto the noise which it is wrongly said is made by a serpent, and I wheeled about quickly, knowing that if those outlines I had seen were enemies, they surely would not be thus giving warning of their approach.

Gabriel advanced a few paces, uttering the low hoot of an owl, and then assured that this announcement had been understood, three strangers advanced swiftly yet silently toward us.

Before they were come up, however, I had my musket ready for immediate use in case it should so chance their intentions were not friendly; but such precaution was needless, for as the foremost of the strangers came near, Gabriel seized him by the hands.

"Who is it?" I whispered with impatient curiosity, and Gabriel replied:

"This is Jacob Breen, a neighbor of ours in St. John's Parish, whom I would have gone in search of if we had had time on that day we stopped at my home."

"And with me are Henry Moulton and Jared Green," the newcomer said in the faintest of whispers, adding immediately afterward, "Come farther back into the thicket, for yonder, where you may see that tiny flame, is encamped a squad of Britishers, who have with them a lad whom, if I mistake not, I have seen in Charleston."

"Seth Hastings!" burst from the lips of both Gabriel and me, and then he who was known as Jacob Breen proposed leaving our comrades peacefully sleeping, for so weary were the poor fellows

that it would have required something more than a whispered conversation to have awakened them, while we five went forward.

Not until we had walked two or three minutes, and then come upon a dense thicket, did we halt, when Gabriel squatted upon the ground, which movement we took as a token that we should follow his example, lest even in the gloom of the night our forms might be seen by some prowling enemy if we remained erect.

There, huddled together like frightened sheep, we were completely hidden, and I asked, before any one else could speak, the question which had come to my mind when Gabriel spoke the name of Jacob Breen:

"How did you come to find us in the darkness?"

"We were riding from home, counting to gain Snow's Island to-morrow morning, travelling at night rather than in the day because of knowing there were so many redcoats hereabout, when we came upon old Peter."

"Then you must have gone on to where the command is halted."

"I know not what you mean by that," Jacob replied in perplexity. "We met the negro less than a quarter of a mile up the road, and there he remains looking after our horses."

Now indeed was I puzzled, as well I might be, for when we left the "ragged army," Peter was riding in the rear of the force as if his only desire was to hear the word given which should halt that company, and I said to Gabriel in my perplexity:

"Can you make out what your friend means, lad?"

"Ay, that I can, William Rufus. When old Peter saw us riding away after word had been given to halt, he understood what was in the wind, for that old negro's head isn't as thick as you may think. Without permission from my brother he has followed, keeping just far enough in the rear to prevent us from seeing or hearing him, while at the same time he could get a fairly good idea of what we were about."

"It is fortunate for us that he did so," Jared Green said in a matter-of-fact tone, "else might we have gone on to meet the general's forces, when, if what Peter tells us be true, this is where we belong."

"What did he tell you?" Gabriel asked curiously.

"That you lads were forming an independent command to be known as Minute Boys, and such is the company we desire to join. Of course, when we halted and turned back in search of you, the remainder of the party went on, having been told by the negro where they would probably find the general and Captain Horry."

"What do you mean by the remainder of the party?" I cried, as a great hope sprung up in my breast, and it was destined not to be dashed, for the lad replied:

"We numbered sixteen when at Gardine's Ferry, but we three were the only lads."

"Then Marion's force will be nearly doubled!" I cried in exultation, and while Gabriel did not give

words to his joy, I understood that he was no less pleased with the information than myself.

It was as if we forgot entirely that a squad of the enemy lay near at hand, and not until Gabriel had explained with considerable of detail what we lads counted to do in the raising of a company of Minute Boys, did I realize that it stood us in hand to have a look at those whose camp-fire I had seen.

"How many are there yonder of the enemy?" Gabriel asked when I brought to his mind the fact that we had other work than that of discussing private matters, and Jacob Green replied:

"Twelve or fourteen, counting the boy, and from what we saw of the party it did not appear that they were camping there for the night, but had halted to await the coming of friends."

"Let us see if we can learn more concerning them," Gabriel suggested, and as we arose to our feet I stepped aside, thus indicating that he was to take the lead, for there was none in all the Colonies who could do such work better.

We advanced, making no more noise than would have been caused by an Indian, for in those days lads were trained to woodcraft from the time they could go abroad, until we were come to the edge of the road, on the opposite side of which was the fire, as if it had been built to attract attention. Around it, sitting or lying on the ground, were a dozen men or more, and on the side nearest us, where we could have a good view of his face, was that villainous traitor, Seth Hastings.

Near by were tethered the steeds belonging to the

party, and because there were no pack-horses among them, I inferred that this squad had been sent out from Nelson's Ferry to guide some expected party to a certain encampment.

At the moment, however, I did not give full rein to my speculations, for the fellows were talking with Seth Hastings, and it stood us in hand to listen, because the information to be gained might be valuable. It would seem as if the men had been questioning Seth Hastings as to his ability to do something which had been spoken of, for one of them said when I came within earshot:

"It's a blind chase, this searching for a party of rebels who by this time may have returned home, hoping to keep secret the part they have been playing."

To this Seth Hastings replied quickly, as if speaking of a friend:

"Francis Marion will never lay down his arms so long as one other can be found to stand by him."

"But what reason have we for believing you can lead us directly to him?"

"Because I know his haunts," the scoundrel said, as if he was telling the truth. "So far all they have accomplished has been done by surprising your people, and I guarantee that two companies of soldiers like you, who shall come out determined not to be taken off your guard, will make a different showing."

"Of that I have no question; but the rebels, knowing well the country, can easily disperse be-

tween the time we have ferreted them out and word has been sent back to the regiment. Then again, we must trust to your finding them, which I misdoubt greatly, else are you a keener lad than I have heretofore seen in the Carolinas."

Then it was that one who wore the straps of a sergeant, and was evidently the leader of the squad, said decidedly, as if he would put an end to the discussion without further words:

"Even though the rebels may be where this lad has stated, I fail to see what excuse we have for advancing without orders. What is to be gained by spending the night in the saddle, when we may remain quietly until daylight, perhaps?"

"For my part," another trooper added, "I would rather sleep here than go scouting among the trees after such a slippery customer as Marion is said to be. By holding closely to the orders given us, we may lie down behind these bushes until those whom we are expecting come up."

"And then," the sergeant added, "we have simply to go back to Nelson's Ferry, when those who have remained idle in camp may watch over the hundred or more scurvy rebels which are being brought down from Camden."

Then it was that the troopers ceased speaking, as if the matter had been definitely settled among them, and we had no need to remain longer, since we knew very much of that which the commander had desired we should learn.

I pressed Gabriel's arm in token that it was time we moved on, and he turned to retrace his steps at

once, knowing, most like, that it was time for us to be up and doing.

When we were arrived at where our comrades were sleeping I gave words to the perplexity which was in my mind:

"We know full well why the squad is camping there, but how does it chance that Seth Hastings can be with every party of redcoats whom we come across?"

"It would be of little benefit could we know of his movements, because he was so thoroughly frightened last night," Gabriel said with a laugh; "but the chances are that the men in Captain Barfield's command had had quite as much of the sneaking traitor as they desired, and cast him off. In making his way to Nelson's Ferry, perhaps in the rear of those whom he had lately called friends, the scoundrel came upon this squad and attached himself to it, promising, in order to gain friendship, that he would lead them directly to General Marion's camping-place."

"Unless he makes a longer halt than he has since we joined him, I question whether it can be said that he ever does have a camping-place," I replied, and Gabriel interrupted, as if believing we had no time for idle conversation:

"It is plain we must first have a look at the enemy near Nelson's Ferry in order to be able to give such information as is needed. Then must we ride back at full speed, for, as it appears to me, our work will then have been completed."

"There is no need of your going to Nelson's

Ferry," Jared Green said quickly, " for most likely the general already has news regarding the situation there. Our party had a good view of the camp as we came up, and learned from those who lived near by that the redcoats were halted there to take charge of the prisoners which were to be brought from Camden. They are scattered along the water's edge a full quarter of a mile on either side of the ferry, and if it would be possible to come upon them during the night, I question if they could make very much of a stand."

I was eager to ride back at once with such report as we would be able to give, for knowing now of Seth Hastings's whereabouts, I said that the next time we made a dash that traitor should be my prisoner. Gabriel was of the same mind, as I learned when we awakened our comrades, and ten minutes later we were leading our horses through the woods at a respectable distance from the road, until having come to where old Peter had stationed himself.

The negro made no excuse for having followed us, even when Gabriel told him harshly that he should be reported to the general for having come away without permission; but aided the new recruits in mounting, and then got into his own saddle, keeping silent all the while, as if the possible reproof which he might receive from the commander made but little difference to him.

After mounting, our progress was no more rapid than if we had remained on foot, for it seemed impossible to urge the animals at a pace faster than a walk, and I believed morning must be near at

hand when we finally come to the place where our people had halted.

All of our men were not given over to slumber, as we knew by our being challenged before understanding how near to us were our friends, and five minutes later we were standing by the side of the general and Captain Horry, the former asking without rising to his feet, as if his eyes had not been closed in slumber:

"What disaster has befallen you?"

We soon gave him to understand that fortune had played us a good turn, and immediately the information was given both the officers were on their feet. One would have said that neither had ever known fatigue, to have seen the two as they ran here and there shaking the slumberers into wakefulness.

I supposed the news we brought would have caused some sensation in camp, but never believed it would be acted upon so quickly. Within fifteen minutes from the time of our being challenged by the sentinel, every man was in the saddle, and we eight lads who formed the company of Minute Boys were riding at the head of the column in order to point out the place where the soldiers and Seth Hastings were encamped.

We now learned that it was midnight; the tired men and their horses had enjoyed six hours of rest, and although our advance was not rapid, we pressed forward with greater speed than I had believed possible, for our own steeds appeared to be revived by the companionship of the others.

Old Peter had not been reprimanded as was his due; indeed the fact was that neither Gabriel nor I had remembered to tell the general of his having followed us, so great was the excitement after our arrival at the camping-place, and he had no share in my thoughts as we advanced, until suddenly he came riding up from the rear, saying when he was abreast of Gabriel:

"Down yander am wha' I stood wid de hosses, Marse Gabriel," and hearing this, our commander gave the order to halt by bringing his own steed to a standstill.

But for the old negro we might have overridden the place in ignorance of our whereabouts, and thus we were spared the chagrin of acting as guides while not being familiar with the ground. Without delay eight men dismounted that they might continue on under cover of the foliage, and thus surprise the squad.

All of us lads would have accompanied them, but General Marion bade us remain where we were, saying that we had already done enough of labor that night, and in silence we waited to hear those sounds which would tell that Seth Hastings was in our power, although it would have pleased us better to have had a hand in taking the traitor.

However, no signal came to betoken a fight, and as the minutes passed on in silence Captain Horry grew impatient of delay, thinking, most likely, that we might not be able to gain Nelson's Ferry before daybreak, therefore proposed that we move on at a slow pace.

This we did until having come to the embers of a camp-fire, where our scouts were awaiting us with empty hands. Then it was that my heart grew heavy with disappointment, for I understood, although wholly ignorant of how it may have been brought about, that once more Seth Hastings had given us the slip.

Lest I make too many words in the telling of what may not seem to a stranger as of great importance, let me say, without going into details, that we soon came to guess at what had happened.

It was most probable that the wretched prisoners with their guards had come down the highway while we were riding back to give the commander the result of our efforts in the way of scouting, and the squad we were eager to capture had gone, of course, in the direction of Nelson's Ferry as guide to the newcomers.

To me this was a most bitter disappointment, for I had counted positively on seeing Seth Hastings before we tried conclusions again with the enemy; but our officers were of a different opinion.

"It has happened most fortunately for us," General Marion said. "The noise of an encounter might have given the alarm to those still farther on, if peradventure those fellows had made a fight of it, and the men guarding the prisoners would have come up. Now the way is clear for our purpose, and we have nought to do save ride directly on, taking due care not to overrun the game."

"And in the meantime that sneaking cur will have the chance to give us the slip," I whispered to

Gabriel, and the dear lad pressed my hand, as if understanding how sore at heart I was, as he replied:

"Please God, there are many long days yet ahead of you and me, William Rufus, and before they come to an end we will have triced up that young scoundrel where there can be no danger of his giving any more information to the redcoats."

Once more the "ragged regiment" moved on, and what happened for a time I am unable to say of my own knowledge, for I fell asleep while in the saddle, regardless of my bitter disappointment because Seth Hastings had escaped, not being conscious of anything more until the halting of my horse nearly threw me over his head.

We had arrived within a mile of Nelson's Ferry, and it was yet night. Unless some unfortunate accident occurred at the last moment, there would soon be an opportunity of learning whether the cream of the British army would hold firm under such a surprise as we might be able to give them.

The purpose of the halt was not to reconnoitre, as I had at first supposed, but in order that a squad might be detached from our small force to gain possession of the road in the swamp at the point known as Horse Creek, while we were to attack the main body in the rear.

The scouts had been sent ahead half an hour before my awakening, and now came back with the report that the prisoners had arrived, the enemy being yet encamped on the east bank of the creek,

not having made an attempt to cross in the darkness.

Once more would General Marion have a chance to execute his favorite manœuvre, the only one by which he could hope to win while the odds were so heavily against him.

Twenty minutes or more were spent in waiting for the detachment to get into position at Horse Creek, when the advance was resumed, this time at a slow pace, lest the tread of our horses upon the road should give the alarm.

Despite the fact that I knew full well we would soon be engaged in a deadly encounter, slumber weighed heavily upon my eyelids, and it was only with difficulty I could prevent them from closing. Rather like one in a dream, than a lad who burned to give his life for the Cause, I held myself in the saddle, and it seemed as if no more than ten minutes had elapsed when we were halted again, this time so near the enemy that the gleam of his campfires could be seen.

General Marion's force was about to be hurled upon the best men in the king's army, as we knew full well, through the report given by those men who had accompanied Jacob Breen and his comrades, for they told us that the Prince of Wales's Regiment and a portion of the Sixty-third had been selected to conduct the prisoners. Therefore was it reasonable to suppose that there were considerably more than three hundred men to be encountered.

We who knew little or nothing of military tactics, we who were mounted upon jaded steeds, and

half-stupefied through lack of sleep, were to charge a camp of well-armed men, most likely in the best possible condition, and if the end for us of the Southern Colonies was near, it seemed as if this was indeed the last moment on earth.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRISONERS

THERE was no hope in my mind, as we stood ready to begin the attack upon the redcoats who guarded the prisoners, that we might be successful, and I fancied from his silence that Gabriel Marion had much the same idea as I.

Even with those new recruits which had just joined us, the "ragged regiment" was yet no more than a handful of men, who were about to try conclusions, as I have already stated, against the pick of the English forces. That we should be able to ride through this camp, as we had the other two, seemed an absolute impossibility, and, as the matter presented itself to my mind, the utmost of success which could be reasonably anticipated was that while we engaged the attention of the escort, some of the prisoners might succeed in escaping.

I firmly believed that when this combat was come to an end, we, who took the patriot side of it, would have struck our last blow in behalf of the Cause; for when it was ended there seemed little probability any of us would be alive or at liberty.

We lads who called ourselves the Minute Boys made ready for the coming engagement by forming a compact body, each being determined that we would bear our share in this fight as a separate

command, for we were like never to have another opportunity of riding shoulder to shoulder in behalf of the Cause.

"It is not fair that Gabriel should ride in advance of us, even though he be the leader," Archie Gordon said in a whisper during those brief moments when we were awaiting the signal of attack. "There are few of us lads, and each should have an equal opportunity of showing whether it is in him to play the part of a man."

"And that is what you shall have, lad," Gabriel replied as he pulled his horse back until standing in line with the others, and he had no more than spoken when General Marion said in a low tone, but so distinctly that all could hear the words:

"Follow me, comrades, and do not make the mistake of thinking that this is anything of a desperate dash, for you have but to do what has been done twice before and victory will be ours beyond a peradventure."

Then he spurred his horse forward without further word of encouragement or command, and in another instant we were riding at full speed straight for the encampment where there was every reason to believe three or four hundred well-trained, well-armed soldiers were ready to receive us to the best of their ability.

Were it not that all this account of what was done at Nelson's Ferry by the handful of men under General Marion's command has been set down again and again in the pages of history, I would hesitate to tell the story, lest those who may read it accuse

me of drawing the long bow in order to make that which we did appear all the more heroic. I am free to confess that even now, as I look back upon that night in memory, it seems more like some fantastical dream than an absolute reality, for by all the rules of war we should have been wiped out of existence before we had come within striking distance of the encampment.

However, I am setting down only that which was done, and there are hundreds of men living to-day who can bear me out in every statement I make.

We were about midway from where the last halt had been made and the British camp, which was set up in true military order, with tents in abundance and sentinels posted properly, when our commander gave the word for us to make ready for opening fire.

"See to it that every shot counts!" he cried, now that the redcoats could be seen pouring out from their tents like so many wasps from their nest. "If we can strike a sufficiently heavy blow at first, the work is done before having been fairly begun, therefore look well to your aim."

We were less than half a musket-shot distant when the word to fire was given, and by this time the surprised soldiers were gathered in a dense mass, as if awaiting the word to form into line, and he who would have failed to hit a target must have shot wild indeed.

The effect of this first volley was that men fell by scores, one bullet most like wounding several,

and the officers had not yet buckled on their finery to receive us according to the British ideas of warfare, when we were riding directly upon the soldiers, who would have fought bravely enough had they stood in proper alignment according to their training.

It was with these disciplined soldiers as it had been with those we had previously encountered; they were bewildered, frightened by what one of them afterward called our "unsoldierly attack." Had we been sufficiently polite to give them due warning that they might have formed in rank to receive us, then indeed had we been wiped out as one snuffs a candle. Or perchance, if the officers had had time to show themselves in proper uniform, then might the result have been different, but as it was we rode straight through them, many leaping into the stream to wade or swim across as best they might, while others took to the woods on the right, and the greater number fled before us, an undisciplined, terrified mob. We gave them three volleys as we rode on in pursuit for half a mile, the Minute Boys cheering wildly because they had, as was indeed the fact, ridden in the forefront of that stampede, and then to my surprise came the word to halt.

While we were yet aquiver with the excitement of the sudden dash and unexpected victory, came the order to wheel about, and at full speed, as if bent on retreating at the very instant he was victorious, General Marion led us at our swiftest pace back to the encampment.

Here we found about a hundred and fifty prisoners, some of whom, when their guards fled, began searching for weapons dropped by the redcoats in their flight, and at the same time taking good care to secure one or more horses.

"Let every man follow this force!" General Marion shouted, raising his voice to the full strength of his lungs in order to make himself heard by all, for many of the prisoners were very nearly in the same state of bewilderment as were those whom we had driven out of camp. But he understood that some reason must be given, else would those so lately released refuse to obey. "The British will not go far before their officers are able to bring them into something approaching order, and then may we expect an attack. If you would save yourselves now that we have freed you, obey without questioning whatsoever commands may be given!"

He halted no longer than was necessary for those who had been driven down from Camden like sheep, to understand what he said, and then, urging our horses at their best pace, we rode back over the road just traversed.

"And now, what?" Jacob Breen asked of me in an angry tone. "Is this how General Marion fights, by running away when he has the upper hand of the enemy?"

"It is not for us to question what he may or may not do," I said with considerable of sharpness in my tone. "When a man has led such a handful as followed him half an hour ago to the victory

which we have just won over so large a force, his courage cannot be questioned."

All this I said as if in my mind everything had been done as it should be, and yet I was sore even as Jacob showed himself to be, because of what looked like nothing more or less than a shameful retreat. Gabriel rode by my side moodily, while Archie Gordon did not venture to make any comments upon our last success, thereby showing me these two also were disturbed in mind.

Our horses had been jaded some time before we overrode the British camp, and now that we were retracing our steps it was with difficulty they could be forced forward at anything like a decent rate of speed, while the prisoners, whose steeds were comparatively fresh, would have pressed on in advance but that Captain Horry and General Marion forced them to remain in line, threatening to shoot the first who should make any attempt at gaining the lead.

In this sorry fashion we travelled perhaps five miles, and then we were come to what seemed an advantageous position in the event of being attacked, whereupon word was given to halt and make preparation for defence.

When the horses had been picketed amid the timber of a small hill, one side of which formed a bluff on the bank of the creek, and those whom we released from captivity had fraternized with our men, General Marion ordered them into line, coupling such command with orders to his own force

to round the strangers up into shape if they were not inclined to obey.

I was filled with astonishment as we lads stood somewhat apart from the remainder of the force watching the proceedings, for I had supposed that these men who had been rescued from a horrible fate would be so thankful that every command would be obeyed on the instant, whereas they lounged here and there as if to show that they considered themselves free from military authority.

However, after a time, they were ranged in ranks two or three deep, and our commander, with Captain Horry, stood in front of them more like a suppliant, as it seemed to me, than one who had every right to be obeyed.

Then, as if he had been a recruiting officer pleading for enlistments, he told of what he hoped might be done in the future toward ridding the Carolinas of the enemy which overran the soil; he belittled the disaster at Camden, put the blame where it belonged, rather than upon the men themselves, and concluded by asking that those who were willing to join his "ragged regiment" step forward half a dozen paces.

I expected to see every man advance, for even though they might not have had the love of country so very strong in their hearts, gratitude because of what had been done in their behalf should have compelled them to do as our commander requested.

Instead, however, to their shame be it said, only sixteen of that one hundred and fifty presented themselves as recruits, and this at a time when

their native land called for every hand which could be raised in her defence!

I am not mindful to dwell upon this disgraceful event in the history of the Carolinas, but will hasten over it by making some explanation, if indeed any be needed, as to why we failed to enlist every man who had been released that night.

Instead of railing at the former prisoners, General Marion called to his side those who had stepped forward, and the remainder were allowed to discuss the matter among themselves, most like with the hope that others might yet decide to join their force.

Then it was that many of those who had shown themselves to be cowards, as I looked at the matter, began to make excuses as to why they were no longer willing to battle against the yoke of the king. Some said, as if the statement could not be contradicted, that the Cause was already lost; others declared that to fight longer was simply to risk one's life without an object; because the redcoats already overrun the country, and Gates had been defeated, there was not the slightest chance we could even hold our liberty many days.

Gabriel, Archie, and I made our way among these men who wore the buff and blue, to hear further reason as to why they had acted such a cowardly part. It was the captain, one who should have been the first to urge his men to enlist, who said in reply to my questions:

"Surely the Cause has none in the Carolinas save this beggarly force to which you are attached,

while the British occupy every advantageous point in the country. Our people are dispersed or captured; the Virginia and North Carolina militia are scattered to the four winds; Sumter's Legion has been whipped by Tarleton, and their leader is fleeing for his life. In addition to all that, here is a copy of the order which Lord Clinton has sent to the commandants of the different posts throughout the Colonies."

Then the officer handed me a slip of paper on which was written the following:

"I have given orders that all the inhabitants of this province who have subscribed and have taken part in this revolt shall be punished with the greatest rigor; and also those who will not turn out, that they be imprisoned and their whole property taken from them or destroyed. I have ordered in the most positive manner that every militia man who has borne arms with us and afterward joined the enemy shall be immediately hanged."

Lad though I was, and all unused to such business, I soon came to understand how hopeless would be the effort to enlist any more of these men who literally owed us their lives, and said to Gabriel and Archie:

"Let us gain such rest as may be possible while halting here, for it is wasting breath and time to argue with men who, instead of asking for reasons as to why they ought to defend their country, should be eager to get an opportunity."

Then we Minute Boys camped by ourselves — that is to say, lay down on the ground in the same

place, for those brave hearts of Carolina who fought against the king had nothing whatsoever of camp equipage. Our company now numbered eight, and it seemed to me, when taken into comparison with General Marion's "ragged regiment," that we were in great strength.

The disappointment of gaining only sixteen recruits when we should have had a hundred and fifty, and the certainty that those whom we had stampeded would soon be hot on our trail, did not prevent us from sleeping during such time as the halt was continued, and when we were awakened an hour after sunset, it seemed to me as if the desire for yet more slumber was so great that it could not be shaken off.

I was ashamed of such weakness very shortly afterward, when I learned that neither our commander nor Captain Horry had closed their eyes, but busied themselves while we rested in learning whatsoever they might of the situation by questioning those whom we had released. Thus it was they learned that Colonel Wemyss was in command of the escort from whom we had taken the prisoners. We knew he was a brave officer, who served his king as loyally as we tried to serve the Colonies, and would not rest content under the disgrace we had put upon him. Therefore was it certain he would come in pursuit of us as soon as might be.

This information was not kept secret from the men. In fact, during such time as I had the good fortune to serve under Francis Marion, I never

knew him to conceal from his force, whether it was much or small, the true condition of affairs.

Therefore no one was surprised at hearing that we had a long march before us. Captain Horry stated openly that our destination would be Hope Mountain, where it was believed we could not only hold our own against those whom we had every reason to believe were to come in pursuit, but would be in a district where was every reason to believe we might find men who had more of blood in their veins than those whom Colonel Wemyss had driven like cattle down from Camden.

While we were getting breakfast and feeding the horses, a messenger was despatched to Snow's Island to give information there as to our movements, and also instruct those left in charge of the camp to bring whatsoever of stores and ammunition might be readily transported to the new encampment. Then we were ordered to make ready for the march within reasonable time, and as our people brought out food from their wallets to break their fast, those faint-hearted prisoners who dared not stand up like men because my Lord Clinton had sent out his bombastic proclamations far and near urged that we share with them our scanty allowance of food, thus giving me the keen satisfaction of telling one of that weak-kneed crowd how I would serve out those who refused to stand up for themselves.

"Whatsoever I have shall ever be shared with those who are serving the Cause," I said, and no doubt spoke to my elders in a way unbecoming a

lad, "but when men who do not dare to brave the threats of those who serve the king, ask for food, I would deny it them even though they were starving, and I had of such abundance that I knew not what disposition to make of it."

Some of the hungry cowards laughed at me, but that did not dispel the satisfaction which was mine at thus having an opportunity of giving free words to the angry thoughts which had been mine since the moment they failed to respond to the commander's request.

The "ragged regiment" was on the march before the sun was two hours high, we Minute Boys riding side by side, as may be supposed, and it was only natural that we should speak of the events of the previous night.

Now it must not be supposed that until this time we had wholly forgotten that traitor Seth Hastings. More than once during the hours of darkness after we had put the redcoats to flight, did we give words to our disappointment at having failed even to see the cur; but now while we had so much of leisure on our hands Archie Gordon must needs be laying plans to capture him. To have heard the lad talk one might have fancied we Minute Boys were of sufficient numbers to make an attack wheresoever it pleased us, as can be seen from the proposition which he made. I am setting it down here, not that it adds interest to the story which I am trying to tell, but rather in order to show how much of courage there was in the little fellow's heart.

"If it so be this Colonel Wemyss comes in chase

of us, as General Marion believes, why may we Minute Boys not lie in ambush, after having learned of the direction in which he is to advance, and if Seth Hastings yet remains with that command, boldly cut him out of the force.

"And would you enlist in any such harebrained venture as that, lad?" Jacob Breen asked in surprise, whereupon Archie replied in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Why should I not? There is no more of danger in it than in this force falling upon the redcoats at Nelson's Ferry."

Captain Horry came riding up from the rear just at this moment, and, hearing a portion of the remark, asked curiously as to what proposition we were discussing. I repeated what our comrade had said, and the captain seemed to think there was something comical in it, for he laughed heartily as he spurred his horse forward to tell the story to the commander.

We were arrived at Hope Mountain shortly after noon, and at once set about making an imitation of a regular camp by building shelters of brushwood, for there was every likelihood we would remain here many days. We Minute Boys built quite a stately hut for ourselves, with a shelter for the horses immediately in the rear, so that when it rained they might not get wet, therefore forcing us to spend a long time in caring for them lest they take cold. Horses, it must be understood, were to people in our position next in importance to ammunition, and he who had not groomed and fed

his steed before caring for himself would most likely have heard a sharp reprimand from one of the officers.

We Minute Boys were proud of our handiwork when the camp was finished, and, had we so desired, could have had from among the men many comrades, for our quarters were most comfortable as compared with some of the shelters set up by the more indolent of the force.

Before another four and twenty hours had passed those who were left in charge of the supplies at Snow's Island arrived with all the led horses that could be procured, each bearing a full burden of provender or provisions, and on the third day twenty of our people rode across the swamp to bring back yet more stores; therefore when this last expedition returned we had no fear of suffering from lack of food even though we remained fully two weeks in this encampment at the foot of the mountain.

The days were passed in idleness, save for the grooming of the horses, and although not a trooper left the camp, we were kept well informed regarding the movements of the enemy, by such of the people round about as were friendly to the Cause.

Therefore it was we heard sad news from Camden, when the humane and tender-hearted Lord Cornwallis hanged eight old men and seven boys, prisoners he had taken after the battle, simply because there was a suspicion that they may have been in the so-called rebellion. From every quarter came stories of barbarity and excesses committed

by the British officers, and that which seemed like a great misfortune soon proved, despite the horror, to be a blessing in disguise, for it drove into our ranks every man from the surrounding country, who had ever been charged, whether rightfully or no, with taking any part whatsoever in resistance to the king's oppressions.

Within six days there were enrolled among the followers of General Marion no less than five hundred and fifty good men, tried and true, but it is not to be supposed that the entire force remained in camp. In fact, although the brigade was being strengthened daily, the army was decreasing, and for two good reasons: first, such a body could not be readily supplied with provisions, and secondly, because the majority of these troopers were men of families, who, during this season of inactivity, took advantage of the opportunity to provide for the needs of those at home.

Then came the day when word was brought to us by some of the patriots who lived near about Georgetown, that Lord Cornwallis was secretly disturbed by what we had already done, and was deeply fearing that which we might do, therefore he was about to send against us not only Tarleton's Legion, but a strong force of the Sixty-third Regulars under Colonel Wemyss.

By this time not only had the "ragged regiment" increased in size, as I have said before, but the number of our Minute Boys had been added to until seventeen responded to the roll-call. Gabriel had, a few days before word was brought as to how

high we patriots stood in the estimation of the British commander, begun drilling us that we might be able to present somewhat of a military appearance, and right glad were we for the occupation, because the monotony of camp-life, which had begun to grow wearisome, was thus broken.

Archie, in whose eyes our ranks of seventeen looked to be a formidable army, now began to repeat his proposition that we lay plans for the capture of Seth Hastings, making them wholly independent of what General Marion might do, and before many hours had passed the most timid of us came to fancy that there was more of reason than rhyme in this bold proposition.

In fact, so thoroughly did he accustom us by his words to the possibility of making an attack from ambush upon the British lines as they came up, that when finally we learned our commander had come to an end of remaining passive, the first thought in our minds was as to whether we might not carry out that which had previously seemed so wild and harebrained.

But I must not overrun the story of what General Marion did, in my desire to set down all the movements of the Minute Boys, therefore is it necessary I come back to the night when men from Georgetown rode in with the information as to what the British contemplated.

We lads were alone in our hut, as was our custom, for it seemed to us as if by remaining apart from the troopers we emphasized the fact of being an independent command, and while we were

eagerly discussing Archie's proposition Captain Horry entered.

I understood full well from the expression on his face that the visit was not an idle one, and therefore waited in nervous expectancy until, having acquainted himself with the purport of our conversation, he stated his business with the manner and in a tone of one who believes he brings welcome news:

"You can judge from what I am about to tell you, as to whether or no the commander believes you may be of great assistance in the deadly struggle which undoubtedly is before us. Within the next four and twenty hours we of the 'ragged regiment' will strike another such blow as was delivered when our force remained small, and among the foremost to advance it is General Marion's intention to count the Minute Boys, if they are so minded."

"If we are minded?" Archie cried eagerly, without waiting for Gabriel to speak, as he should have done. "The general knows full well how eager we are to be at work. This idle life is not to our liking."

Then it was that Gabriel added gravely:

"We shall welcome most gladly, sir, any order which promises to give us active service."

"I had no doubt but that the word I brought would be welcome, and there is little need for me to beat about the bush. Two hundred or more of our force will set off as soon to-morrow as the people can answer the summons already sent out.

Three hours in advance of the main force fifty picked men will ride, acting as scouts, or whatsoever you choose to call them, and in the event of gaining any information concerning the whereabouts of the enemy, one can be sent to the rear to report to the commander, while the others hover on the enemy's line of march in the hope of picking up stragglers."

"It is as if General Marion had arranged matters to suit our plans," Archie cried exultingly, and Captain Horry said with an indulgent smile:

"I question whether your traitorous friend, if it so be he remains with the Britishers, will risk his precious skin very far from the main camp; but, of course, there is always a possibility, and it is the unexpected which more often happens. Then I am to say to General Marion that you Minute Boys are willing to form a portion of the picked company?"

"You will say to him, sir, if you please, that we are eager to do so, in addition to being willing, and then you will have told but half the truth, for we are indeed burning with the desire to do whatsoever we may, that Carolinians should do," Gabriel cried passionately.

"You are accepting a post of danger," the captain said gravely, "for those who ride in advance stand every chance of being gobbled up by Tarleton or Wemyss."

Then he lingered an instant as if to learn whether one or more of us was minded to show the white

feather, and seeing nothing save joyful anticipation written on our faces, he went out into the night leaving us congratulating each other upon what we considered our good fortune.

CHAPTER IX

A TRAP

THERE is no good reason why I should go into details concerning the preparations which we made for this reconnoissance when we Minute Boys of South Carolina were to march shoulder to shoulder with picked troopers from General Marion's command.

In fact, we gave very little heed to the details, save to make certain our horses were in the pink of condition, and our weapons as they should be. We were so puffed up with pride because of having been selected as fit companions for the best men in the "ragged regiment," as to have little room in our minds for aught else. Nor was our pride abated next morning when we learned that Captain Horry himself was to lead the detachment, and Gabriel said to me with an air of satisfaction:

"It must be, William Rufus, that this movement is of more importance than we had anticipated, else Captain Horry would not march at the head. We shall have a commander who will not shirk his duty, however great may be the opposing force we meet."

And I, my heart warming to the dear lad because of the joy he displayed in thus being permitted to risk his life, said stoutly:

"We would have a commander equally to be relied on, if the Minute Boys had been sent out on this mission alone."

For an instant Gabriel failed to understand my meaning, and then a deep flush overspread his face as he gripped me by the arm to show his gratitude.

"You are not warranted in making any such statement, William Rufus, and I know full well you do so only because of the affection there is between us two."

I would have insisted that there could be no change in my sentiments regarding his ability as a leader whatsoever the feeling we entertained each for the other, but was interrupted by one of the troopers, who thrust his head in at the door of our hut, saying in a quiet tone, as if not minded that all should hear him:

"The order is that all who are to follow Captain Horry shall be in readiness for the march within five minutes."

We Minute Boys were not minded that any of the older soldiers should obey the command more readily, and therefore it was that when Captain Horry had made his own preparations we were already in the saddle, standing in a squad by ourselves as if to show that it was our purpose to hold the company distinct from the troopers.

There was no leave-taking when we departed from the camp, as a matter of course, for such signs of friendship are not considered, as I have since learned, seemly in those who follow the profession of arms; but when we rode out from the encamp-

ment General Marion waved his hand in a friendly manner, most like intending the gesture for his brother's eye only.

Once we were on the road, all our company were puffed up with pride, when Captain Horry called Gabriel to ride in the advance by his side. This was showing, as we would have it shown, that our leader was recognized as such, and we placed upon the footing so ardently desired — that of an independent company. We rode steadily at a brisk trot for a full hour, and then Gabriel slackened pace that he might fall back with us lads, I asking, as he pulled his horse in by my side:

"Why did you not continue with the leader? It gave us hearty pleasure to see you in your proper place at the head of the column."

"And I am still keeping my proper place, William Rufus, therefore you need not begin to show jealousy lest the Minute Boys fail to receive due recognition. The fact is that we are to cut loose from this force within the next half-hour."

"And do a little work on our own account?" Archie, having overheard the words, asked eagerly.

"Ay, that is the way it appears now, although the task is not to my liking, for through it we stand a good chance of being cut out from our share of the fight in case the advance-guard of the enemy is come upon."

"Tell us what you mean?" I cried irritably, for the possibility that we might be detached in order to prevent our taking full share of the danger was a blow to my pride.

"In half an hour, as Captain Horry figures, we shall have come to the crossroads within a couple of miles of the Sinclair plantation, and no one can say in which direction the enemy may approach. Therefore is this force to be separated, one party bearing to the left, and the other halting at Sinclair's."

"Then we are like to have an opportunity of going into action on our own account," Archie cried gleefully, believing by such a move we might have an opportunity to show what the Minute Boys could do unaided.

Gabriel was not so sanguine that ours might be the most dangerous task, and said with an air of gloom, as I fancied:

"I made much the same proposition to Captain Horry, but he insists that it is an even chance whether his force or ours first comes upon the redcoats."

"If the order has been given for us to go to Sinclair's, it strikes me it is a waste of breath to argue as to which may be the post of danger," Jacob Breen cried, forcing his horse nearer that he might take part in the conversation, "and it is as important for us Minute Boys to show that we can obey a command without question, as to prove our ability to stand against the enemy."

There was much of sense in what Jacob had said, and I gave over speculating as to which direction might bring us the best opportunity to win renown, because of realizing that if we were to prove ourselves soldiers it was in the highest degree im-

portant we show our readiness to abide by whatsoever decision the commander might make.

"Of course, it is not for us to say that we will go here or there," Gabrel added to me in a low tone, "and yet there is in my mind not a little of disquietude because we are to halt at Sinclair's to await the possible coming of the enemy."

"Meaning that you fear we shall miss the redcoats?" I said with a laugh, and he replied gravely:

"I know not what it is I fear; but it appears to me, without my being able to give any reason, that there will be no honor for us this day."

Having spoken thus strangely, as it seemed to me, Gabriel rode on in advance once more, and twenty or thirty minutes later we were come to the crossing of the roads, when without other leave-taking than a military salute, our leader swung his horse sharply off to the right, we boys following him in silence.

I question if there was one among us unacquainted with the Sinclair plantation, and I said to myself that even though it should be our ill fortune to miss some brave adventure which the others might come upon, we could at least console ourselves with the knowledge that a hearty welcome awaited us, for the master of the plantation was true to the Cause, but too far advanced in years to take field against the oppressors.

Gabriel rode moodily in advance, his heart burdened by something which he could not define, and

did not recover his wonted cheerfulness until we were come within sight of the plantation.

I had supposed that we should be greeted, when we first came upon the boundary of the estate, by some of the slaves, who would immediately carry word of our approach to the dwelling, but to my surprise no living thing was to be seen, even when we arrived at the first row of huts in the negro quarters and Gabriel, turning suddenly in his saddle, looked questioningly into my face.

"The place has been abandoned," I said involuntarily, not crediting my own words, and Archie Gordon cried:

"Then are the Britishers between us and our people, instead of in advance, as Captain Horry believes!"

By this time we were come to the main entrance of the house, where the doors should have been flung wide open at the sound of our horses' hoofs, for Master Sinclair was noted throughout the Colonies for his hospitality.

Not a sound could be heard as Gabriel dismounted, beckoning me to do the same, and the other lads remained in the saddle as we two opened the door, which was unfastened, and entered the dwelling.

Inside it was as if the family had just stepped out for a moment; nothing appeared to be disturbed, such as must have been the case in the event of the redcoats visiting the plantation, for those hirelings of the king never lost an opportunity

to destroy whatsoever of property they came across which could not be carried away.

We shouted as we went from one apartment to the other, but received no reply, and then for the first time did Gabriel speak:

"There has been something of disaster here, Rufus, and what it is we should learn without delay."

"But I see no signs of wrong-doing, or of trouble. Mayhap the Sinclairs have gone away for a friendly visit."

"But why should the dwelling have been left thus deserted with not a door fastened?"

"I question if Master Sinclair ever believed it necessary to bar his doors," was my reply, and at the same time there was much of disquiet in my mind, for the entire absence of life upon this plantation where I had ever seen so much of bustle and gaiety, was mystifying.

Having satisfied ourselves that the dwelling was indeed unoccupied, Gabriel led the way to the front door, and there said to Jacob Breen and Archie Gordon:

"Ride through the negro quarters and out into the fields, to see if you may come across any of the servants."

The lads departed at once, and when Gabriel seated himself on the edge of the veranda, his chin in his hands as if trying to solve some difficult problem, Jared Green, forgetting that it was a soldier's duty to remain silent until spoken to by his

commander, asked with somewhat of fretfulness in his tone:

"Is there any good reason why we should remain in the saddle while the sun beats down on us so fiercely?"

"No, lad, I had forgotten my duty," Gabriel replied gently, looking up as if just aroused from some dream. "It is well that you stable and feed your horses while there is opportunity, for we may be in need of leaving this place hurriedly, when fresh steeds will be of more value than those that are jaded."

The lads knew full well where to find quarters for the animals, and they rode away, taking with them Gabriel's horse and mine, whereupon our leader looked at me with mute inquiry in his eyes. There was no need for him to give words to the question which I saw there.

"I cannot make a guess, lad. It is enough for us, however, that there are no signs of the British near about, and, as I look at the matter, we are as clearly bound to remain here on guard as if having found the family waiting to give us welcome."

"You are right, Rufus; of that there can be no question, but I would give all the little I possess were it possible to read correctly the riddle, for such it is. If Master Sinclair and his family had gone away for a visit, they surely would not have taken half a hundred negroes with them. Even though it might not be necessary to leave the house-servants behind, what about the field-hands?"

While the question remained unanswered Archie

and Jacob rode up with an expression of blank dismay upon their faces.

"There is nothing on this plantation alive, not even poultry," Archie cried, leaping from his horse and standing before us as if expecting we could give an explanation concerning the abandonment of the property, and Jacob, looking around with something like fear on his face, asked nervously:

"Where are the other lads?"

"Gone to stable their horses," I replied, since Gabriel hesitated. "You had best do the same, and then come back here, bringing the others with you."

The two lads rode away, and Gabriel and I remained silent, neither eager to speak, for there was something ominous in this absence of life where we had expected to find friends.

Ten minutes later all our company of Minute Boys were grouped in front of the dwelling, when ensued such a tongue-wagging as can be fancied, for each had the same question in mind as had Gabriel and I, and all were equally eager for some solution of the mystifying problem. A full half-hour must have passed before Gabriel spoke, and then our lads, having literally talked themselves out, were moving restlessly to and fro as if fearing some disaster was about to fall upon them.

"There is no good reason why we should continue to puzzle our brains over a question which we cannot answer," the lad said with the air and tone of one who has suddenly decided upon some defi-

nite course of action. "Rufus and I are agreed that the abandonment of the plantation has not been caused by the arrival of the Britishers, else would we see signs of their occupation, for it is hardly possible one of the king's soldiers can resist the inclination to destroy whatsoever may be within his reach. Our orders were to remain here a certain length of time that we might be able to give the alarm if the enemy came this way, and the fact that the plantation is deserted does not acquit us of that duty. You have cared for your horses, and now it seems to me that we should remain inside the building, from the windows of which can be had a good view of the highway, in order to perform the task assigned us."

He had but just ceased speaking when the clatter of horse's hoofs told that a single rider was approaching, coming from the southward, and Gabriel turned quickly to open once more the door of the house, as he said:

"Get under cover, lads, until we know who is coming. It may be that the British leader has sent out scouts and this is our chance to gain information."

It was the same as if he had told us to enter the building, and we did so, he leading the way to one of the upper rooms, where, by looking above the tops of the trees, we could have full view of the highway for half a mile or more in either direction.

We had hardly more than stationed ourselves at the one window in this room, which was used for storing comparatively useless odds and ends, when

the horseman whose coming had been announced rode into view.

A red-coated trooper, who came on at a leisurely pace as if there was no reason for making a cautious advance, pulled his horse in at the private entrance of the plantation as if thoroughly familiar with the place. Advancing to the steps where we lads had so lately been standing, he dismounted, allowing his steed to graze wheresoever he would, and threw himself at full length upon the veranda as if awaiting the arrival of comrades.

"Now is the chance to take a prisoner," Jacob Breen whispered excitedly. "It would be the simplest thing in the world to go down and capture him."

"And by so doing take the chances of giving an alarm to whosoever may be following," Gabriel replied. "It is our business to learn as much as possible, rather than carry back an unimportant prisoner."

"But suppose there are twenty-five or fifty following him; what then?" Jacob asked, and on the instant there flashed into my mind the thought that we had willingly entered a trap which had not been baited. Having ascended to the top of the house, we would be held prisoners beyond a peradventure if any considerable force came up, and then all the commander's plans would fail if that which we knew could not be imparted to Captain Horry or General Marion.

I was about to give words to these thoughts when I saw by the expression which suddenly came

over Gabriel's face that he also realized the folly of which we had been culpable.

"We must find a way out by the rear of the house without his knowing of our having been here," he said a moment later, and at the same instant Archie Gordon whispered excitedly, as he pointed out of the window:

"See! Yonder must be the advance of the entire force which has been sent against us!"

Then it was we could see coming up the road squads of horsemen, riding without military formation, and in considerable numbers, the foremost of whom turned in at the road leading to the house.

There was no time to be lost indeed, even if we yet had an opportunity of escaping, and immediately Gabriel led the way out of the room to the only hallway by which one could descend to the lower floor.

He stopped suddenly on the first stair, however, for the man who had been lounging on the veranda entered the building, as he shouted to those riding up the path:

"Here are good quarters, save that there are none to welcome us!"

We lads stepped back in a twinkling, narrowly escaping discovery, for if the fellow had glanced ever so hurriedly up the stairway he must have seen us, and there was nothing left for the Minute Boys of South Carolina, who had counted so confidently upon being able to strike a blow against the king's forces, save to seek refuge in that same attic chamber from which was no outlet except the one leading

directly among the enemy, who by this time were entering the building in large numbers.

We had trapped ourselves, and I dare venture to say that never had would-be soldiers shown themselves more simple. All were equally culpable, if indeed any should be censured for a natural mistake, but Gabriel seemed to think he alone was responsible for the disagreeable position in which we were placed.

"It is better you lads take the command of the Minute Boys away from me, and give it to some one who can show at least a glimmer of common sense," he said bitterly when we had reëntered the room and closed the door behind us, looking questioningly into each other's faces. "None save the veriest fool would have allowed himself, and those who call him leader, to be put in such a trap as this, and on my shoulders must fall all the blame."

So bitter was he upon himself, and in such an attitude did he stand in front of the closed door, that I actually feared he meditated some mad act, such as giving himself, as expiation for his mistake, into the hands of the enemy. Therefore I said soothingly, laying my hand on his shoulder that I might be ready for any unexpected move on his part:

"No, lad, you shall not take all the blame, for one has been as foolish as another. We Minute Boys are comrades, rather than soldiers serving under strict military discipline, and had we suspected what I am free to admit we should have guessed, then was it our place to make objection when you proposed coming here. Instead of seek-

ing to fasten the fault upon one or the other, let us decide what we may do toward getting out of the trap."

It was Archie Gordon who replied to me, as he laughed mirthlessly:

"I am fancying we have no need to spend very much time figuring how we shall get out of here, for the redcoats will attend to all that."

"There is no reason why they should come into the upper part of the house while there is so much of plunder below," I rejoined sternly, with a faint gleam of comfort appearing amid the clouds of despondency; but he said, laughing again:

"They may not come upon us through searching for plunder; but it is reasonable to suppose that upon seeing the horses, which give proof of having been lately used, they will make it their business to know who has been riding them."

I had lost sight entirely of this fact, and it was as if some fresh disaster caused by our folly had come upon us. Perhaps there had been in my mind a hopeful thought that we might be able to get out of the building during the hours of darkness, but now it seemed improbable we could remain hidden even until night had come.

I will not undertake to set down all that was said in that room by us despairing lads. We remained conversing in whispers near the window, where it was possible to have a view of the outside while we ourselves remained unseen, and it began to appear as if all the king's troops in the Carolinas were to rendezvous at the Sinclair plantation.

During the hour which followed our entering the trap that no one had set, there was hardly a moment when we could not see a greater or less number coming up the road, until I believed of a verity there were no less than five hundred horsemen scattered around the estate, or rummaging through the different buildings.

Very shortly after the first squad had come up, ten or twelve officers arrived, and they took quarters in the building, consequently the rank and file were forced to give the place a wide berth. Therefore was there less fear that we should be discovered immediately, for, judging from the sounds, those in command of the king's army were engaged in feasting, having ransacked the cellars rather than the attics. It was at the moment when we were hemmed in by such a troop as made it seem impossible for our friends to deliver us, even though they came in full force, that Jacob Breen found somewhat of cheer in the situation.

"Since they haven't already dragged us out from this place, we stand a fair chance of being able to remain in secret until morning."

"How have you contrived to figure out any such possibility as that?" Archie Gordon asked petulantly, and Jacob said with a smile:

"Where so many horses are stabled, ours will attract but little attention. If the men who have come up last see them, they will believe the steeds belong to their comrades, and if those who first arrived should now make the discovery, they would

have good reason for supposing the animals belonged to some of the later arrivals."

There was no question but that the lad was correct in so far as this went, and it was indeed a slender thread upon which to build hope, but when one is in the desperate situation we then were, he is inclined to catch at any straw whatsoever.

The possibility of remaining yet a few hours longer in that hiding-place served to cheer us ever so little for a few moments, and then were we plunged into gloom again, knowing full well the evil moment could only be postponed for a comparatively brief time.

How that afternoon passed I am unable to say even now, while looking calmly back upon it. Then I was in such a fever of anxiety and self-reproach as to be hardly conscious of what I did or said, knowing, however, that before the day was come to a close all of Tarleton's or Wemyss's followers must have arrived at that one plantation, and on the road in the rear lay our people, waiting for the information which we should have carried them.

There was not one among our party who did not realize that having thus entrapped ourselves, we might bring direst misfortune upon our people, who, not receiving intelligence from us that the enemy were near at hand and in such numbers, might advance only to find themselves overwhelmed.

During the early part of the afternoon the British officers enjoyed themselves noisily in the room below, but as the day came to a close all was hushed,

while sentinels were stationed, so far as we could see, around the house to prevent the troopers from disturbing the repose of their superiors, for it seemed probable these representatives of the king had ministered to their appetites until sleep became a necessity.

We lads, tired of standing, and not daring to move around the room lest the noise of our footsteps should betray us, sat or lay upon the floor as fancy dictated, but Gabriel remained close by the door as if studying profoundly, while I crouched by his side, attempting now and then to beguile him into conversation.

When the sun had set we could see the gleam of fires here and there about the grounds, showing where the soldiers were encamped in the open air, and I said to myself that even though we might succeed in leaving the building, there was little possibility we could make our way undetected past the sentinels and idle soldiery.

The evening was well along when Gabriel began drawing off his boots, and I, not dreaming of the plan in his mind, followed his example, thinking he was making ready to move about because his limbs were cramped, as were mine.

"You are not to go," he whispered sharply, laying his hand upon mine, and I, like the simple that I was, asked in surprise:

"Go where?"

"I count on making an attempt to get away from this place, but there is little hope that two could accomplish it undetected. Because it is through my

stupidity that we Minute Boys are here in this trap, I am the one who should undertake all the risks."

"You would venture down-stairs and then out upon the grounds, which are lighted up by the many camp-fires?" I asked incredulously, and he nodded his head emphatically.

"Then I shall go with you."

"You will do no such thing, Rufus Randolph! Even though I have been a fool, you must still admit I stand as leader of the party, and my orders are to be obeyed. One may do what two could not."

"But suppose you succeed in getting out of the house, what then? You cannot hope to travel on foot so far as will be necessary to come upon our people."

"All that will be as it may chance," he replied. "Some move must be made immediately, for although we have remained here undetected since noon, there is no possibility, when the troopers have orders to march, that our horses will not be discovered as belonging to strangers. As you count it, the danger to you in remaining is greater than may come to me in trying to get away."

By this time nearly all of our comrades, seeing Gabriel removing his boots and holding conversation with me, believed that some plan for relief was in the wind, and gathered round us asking more questions than could have been answered throughout the entire night.

Gabriel put an end to the idle talk by stating in a whisper, yet sufficiently loud for all to hear, what

we would do, and laying his commands upon every one to remain where he was, at least until it was positive that he had gotten well clear of the building, or had been taken prisoner.

"After that, if it so be any of you are minded to tempt fate, then make the attempt," he said. "As for me, if fortune favors, instead of trying to find Captain Horry, I shall travel straight back on the road down which the general and his followers are riding. Now let me go without further words, and if ill betide me, then have I no more than paid the debt I owe you lads for having led you into this trap."

It would have been childish for us to have made any further protest. The dear lad was doing no more than any of the party would have been willing to attempt, and it was absolutely necessary that great risks be taken if we were to come out of that place at liberty.

I could not believe but that the work should have been given to me rather than him, and would have urged my claim, but he cut me off sharply by saying:

"You are to stay here in my place, Rufus, and will prove a better leader for the Minute Boys than I have shown myself, of that there can be no doubt."

He was lifting the latch even as he spoke, and before I could detain him further had passed out into the gloom of the hallway, leaving us standing there with baited breath, our ears strained to catch

the slightest sound which should tell of his having been discovered.

No sound save the hum of voices on the outside, or the heavy tread below as the officers moved from one room to another, came to us, and, not daring to hope that he had succeeded in getting down the entire flight of stairs, we remained there like statues, hardly daring to breathe lest by inflating our lungs we give the signal which would be that of death to our comrade whom we loved so dearly.

CHAPTER X

AN ODD BATTLE

It is impossible to say how long we sat there listening for that which we hoped might not be heard. It seemed to me as if we crouched by the open door straining our ears and gazing blindly into the gloom fully two hours, when Archie Gordon, touching me lightly on the shoulder, said in a tone of relief:

"It must be that Gabriel has succeeded in his purpose, else would we have heard some token, and certain I am that not a voice has been raised or a shot fired since he left this room."

In this last statement I could fully agree with him; but as to whether Gabriel had succeeded in escaping was quite another matter. I felt convinced, even while hoping it might be so, that he could not make his way undetected down through the house, and then past all the sentinels which must be stationed between the building and the highway. Each instant I expected to hear an alarm sounded, believing that during all this while he had been crouching in some hiding-place near the attic chamber.

As the time went by, however, and we knew that not less than an hour had passed, I began to breathe

more freely, for now was it certain the dear lad had given the enemy the slip, even though it seemed impossible anything larger than a mouse could have gone out from there undetected.

My fears, allayed in one direction, sprang up in another, and I began to ask myself whether it would be possible for one on foot, in the night, to come upon either party of our friends?

It was beyond the range of possibility that Gabriel had been able to get a horse without attracting attention, therefore must his travelling be done on foot, and without boots to his feet.

Now it was that my companions, seeing some slight thread of hope in this escape of Gabriel's, were eager to discuss the situation with one another, and all unconsciously we made our way across the room to the window, where, crouched upon the floor, we spoke in softest whispers of what might be done if fortune aided our comrades in every possible way.

Once, while we were thus talking without being able to see each other's faces, I fancied I heard a cautious footstep near at hand, and warned the lads to remain silent while we listened; but when nothing could be distinguished save the sound of our own breathing, I said to myself that it was only a rat in the wall — that I was growing overly nervous, and to indulge in such fancies might result in my finally becoming timorous.

That which we said to each other was of little or no importance; we simply discussed all the known possibilities of the future, and, when tired

of this fruitless occupation, my companions one and all relapsed into silence.

I turned to find Archie Gordon, believing he had taken station directly behind me, but when I spoke it was to learn that Jacob Breen stood thus near. Then I called the lad softly by name, but there was no response, and Jacob whispered sufficiently loud for all to hear:

"Is Archie lying asleep near any of you? I have not heard him speak this past hour."

Because Archie made no response I became alarmed, and crept around the room here and there, forcing each lad to give me his name as I touched him, until the cold sweat of fear broke out on my forehead, for it seemed as if the lad had been spirited away in some uncanny fashion, or was suddenly come to his death.

"Search for him everywhere!" I whispered hoarsely. "He *must* be here, and unless some great evil has befallen him, would answer us."

Then we crept around the room, feeling with our hands every inch of the floor until we were come together in the middle of the apartment with a terror upon us so great that I at least was unable to reason intelligently.

It was Jacob Breen who gave the solution to the riddle, and a wondrous sense of relief was mine at realizing that there was nothing superhuman about this absence of our comrade.

"He has followed Gabriel's example, saying to himself that if one could leave this building, two might succeed," Jacob Breen whispered hesita-

tingly, as if fearing we might make sport because he entertained such an idea.

"It was a brave thing for the lad to do, and now are the chances doubled that our people will get information of what has happened here, for, knowing that Gabriel counted on trying to find General Marion, Archie will set off in the hope of coming upon Captain Horry's force," I said, remembering that faint sound which I had heard and attributed to a mouse in the wall.

I believed Jacob was right in his conjecture, and pressing close to the window, I listened once more with that painful intentness which gets upon one's nerves, so sorely did I fear each instant lest I hear the sound of a shot that would be the death-knell of my friend.

When perhaps another hour had passed, and it seemed certain a second of our party had escaped to carry the tidings, Jared Green said to me:

"If two lads can leave this place without being discovered, why may not all, provided we go one at a time?" and I replied with an irritation born of nervousness:

"Because two have succeeded in accomplishing what seemed to have been the impossible, there is no reason why others may successfully make the same venture."

"But a third has every chance of having equal fortune," the lad persisted, and I said with as much of authority as it was possible to assume:

"The venture must not be tried again, for the next one who went out might be captured or killed,

when the lives of all would be forfeited. Gabriel left me in command, and I charge you to remain where you are."

"It will make little difference whether we are captured now, or in the morning, for surely you don't count that we shall be able to remain here undetected until the Britishers have left?" Jacob persisted, whereat I cried irritably:

"I am counting upon nothing save that we shall hold our lives as long as may be. There is just the shadow of a chance the redcoats may go away without knowing we are here, and I claim there is no possibility whatsoever that even two more could escape."

I question if very many of the lads would have been willing to make the venture, even though Gabriel and Archie had apparently succeeded; but Jacob himself had sufficient courage to set off, and that he was disgruntled because I positively commanded him to remain could be readily understood by his silence.

I was not minded any others should put their lives in jeopardy, and therefore it was that instead of remaining near the window where all had gathered, I took station at the door, as I should have done in the first place, thus making certain no more of our party could give us the slip.

Even though I had been so positive in stating that all must remain, I doubted the wisdom of the command as soon as the lads gave evidence of being willing to obey me, and began to ask myself whether it might not be better some few escape with

their lives than that all be made prisoners, for there was indeed little hope of being undiscovered after sunrise. While pondering over this, and saying that by such a course I was making myself wholly responsible for whatsoever of evil might come, my eyes grew heavy with slumber.

Now, as I look back upon that night, it seems indeed strange that I should have had any desire for sleep when death appeared to be so near at hand, and yet the truth is that I finally lost consciousness.

I may possibly have slept two hours — it could not have been much longer — when I was literally brought to my feet by the crackling of musketry and cries of anger or surprise from the outside. So great was the din on the instant that all my comrades were aroused at the same time, and instinctively we made our way to the window, clustering there without realizing that it might be possible for the sentinels on guard to see us.

"What is it?" Jared Green asked, and he made no effort to speak cautiously. "What has happened?"

It was a question none could answer, for although it was possible to hear the men running to and fro, shouting frantically, as it seemed to me, with now and then a hoarse cry from the room beneath us, we could see nothing distinctly, yet knew beyond a peradventure that some serious disturbance had broken out.

So great was the noise from below that I ventured to raise the window, and, craning my neck to look over the eaves of the building, I gazed down

on what seemed to be a perfect mob of men running to and fro aimlessly, while from the distance came the sharp crack of musketry and the trampling of horses' feet.

"It is our people!" Jacob Breen cried shrilly, clapping me on the back with such force that I was nigh to being hurled headlong from the window. "It is our people! Gabriel or Archie have succeeded in finding one force or another, and an attack is being made!"

As the confusion increased, the reports of musketry sounding nearer, I said to myself that the lad was right, and found it most difficult to prevent giving way to senseless demonstrations of joy.

I wish it might be possible to describe the scene as we saw it thus outlined faintly in the gloom. We could not distinguish individual forms; there were beneath the window so many in the throng that it was before our eyes as a dark, writhing mass with now and then a trooper trying to force a horse among the frantic men. And here, there, and everywhere shouts of command, cries for this man or that, with over all screams of pain as the missiles, which were being poured in by that unseen force, took effect.

It is not to be supposed that this scene of confusion was continued many seconds. We saw the dark mass separate into something like military formation. The meaningless cries died away as the first shock of surprise passed off and the instinct of the soldier came uppermost.

It may not have been more than two minutes

before horses were brought for the officers who had been feasting in the room beneath us, and the men were forming in platoons; but during all this while came the thunder of horses' feet and the crackling of musketry, the cries of command and the groans and shrieks of agony.

It never entered my mind that we lads were in position to strike a blow just then. There could be no question but that our people were making an attack, and I remained there overhanging the eaves of the building, watching with all my heart in my eyes as I said that now was come our deliverance, yet not a finger did I raise toward helping myself.

The first fire from our people was deadly in effect, as could be seen by the huddled masses lying here and there upon the ground when the troopers formed in line, but yet it was not sufficient to win a victory, for the surprise had not been so complete as to create a stampede.

"It is to be a battle here in the night!" I said, forcing my way back from the window with difficulty, because all the lads were pressing close upon me. "It is to be a battle, and if Archie or Gabriel failed to meet those who are making the attack, then are they ignorant of the great odds against them!"

It was necessary now to speak at the full strength of one's lungs in order that the words should be heard, for the Britishers had in turn opened fire, and the detonations of the weapons literally caused the air to quiver.

My cheeks redden with shame even at this late

day, when I set down the fact that it was Jacob Breen who recalled me to a sense of duty — that I had failed of understanding what part we might play in this battle.

"The time has come when we should take a hand," the lad said suddenly. "I know of no reason why we must skulk here like cowards!"

His words thrilled me, causing every nerve to quiver, and on the instant I seemed to see as if it were pictured before my eyes, the course which we should pursue. Without hesitating, and, I hope, speaking as if the thought had been in my mind before Jacob suggested it, I said sharply:

"See to it that you have your weapons ready, and follow me in double file. We will go down this front staircase and out of the house by the back way, so that it will be possible to fall upon the enemy in the rear, and they be made to suppose that reinforcements have come up from the opposite direction."

Now every lad was on fire; the possibility of striking a blow after we had been penned up like rats in a trap was most welcome, and we gave no thought to the danger, or the chance that we might find ourselves in the midst of the redcoats instead of in their rear.

I ran at full speed, regardless of encountering any one in the passageway, after making certain the Minute Boys were following, and when we had traversed the entire length of the building without meeting any one, and came out into the open on that side nearest the slave quarters, it appeared as

if the attacking force was making its way up the lane leading from the road. The Britishers were wheeled about in that direction, and, save for a few skulkers here and there, nothing prevented our making such a demonstration as must be effective.

I led the way round the building until we were at the westerly corner of the front, and there, where we might be screened in case a volley was suddenly poured upon us, said to my comrades:

"Let us discharge our weapons at the same instant in order to make it appear that our force is very large, and that done, each lad is to step back within the shelter of the house while he reloads."

There was no delay in carrying such a plan into execution, nor was it possible for us to miscalculate the aim, since the Britishers were hardly more than twenty yards away, standing in so large a body that we would have fired wild indeed had any of our missiles failed of effect.

Even though we were attacking the enemies of our country, it was not a pleasing thought to me that we were doing our best to take the lives of human beings. But surely it would be a survival of the fittest, and from our point of view the "fittest" were those who had nearest their hearts a love for the Carolinas.

That which gave us greatest pleasure was a cry which came from the rear rank when our bullets took effect, for then we could hear half a dozen of the nearest shout:

"They have outflanked us! The rebels are in the rear!"

I fancied that those of our people who were in front also heard this cry, hoping they understood who was thus creating a diversion, for it seemed to me their fire was redoubled, and I believed I heard cries of encouragement and of joy.

"Waste no time in reloading, lads," I whispered, myself setting the example by charging my weapon, and before the Britishers had really come to understand that there was without doubt a foe behind them, we let go a second volley.

Then in the darkness, while the smoke from our weapons hung heavy before our eyes, I could see that line of Britishers waver, seemingly to have grown weak in the middle, and an instant later came that which caused me to cry aloud in fear and astonishment.

A heavy volley, which must have been made up of at least thirty guns, rang out midway between where we were standing and the main road upon the right flank of the foe.

"Who can be there?" Jacob Breen cried as if in alarm, and I cheered vigorously, for on the instant came the thought that it was the other squad of our "ragged regiment," either that led by Captain Horry, or General Marion, who had thus come upon the scene of conflict.

Now it was that the enemy, fired upon from three widely diverging points, began to suppose they were attacked by an overwhelming force, and that the men were growing uncomfortable in mind we understood by the cries of command for them

to stand firm, or to close up the ranks, which were heard now and then from the officers.

This was as much as telling us that we needed to make but one more desperate attack and the day would be ours. From the front came the huzzas of our people as they charged down upon the line; from the right wing a second and third volley mingled with shouts of triumph, and then it was we Minute Boys added our voices to the din as we fired.

I care not how brave soldiers may be, how reckless they have grown of life, there are none who, in such a position as our enemy was then placed, could hold their ground. In the darkness, attacked by what they believed to be a heavy force from every direction, fired upon from the rear by a seemingly large number, and their right flank pressed by a superior body, there was nothing left but to retreat, for the boldest general who ever commanded an army would have had good reason for believing that to remain longer in that position was to invite annihilation.

Therefore it was only natural, as I have said, the king's soldiers should fall back without loss of time, and that their officers believed the rebels, as they were pleased to call us, had gathered in overwhelming numbers, was shown by the fact that instead of retreating into the building, where they might make a more successful stand, the whole force was drawn back to seek what cover could be found in the rear of the negro quarters.

It was while this manœuvre was being effected

that the main body of General Marion's force charged down upon them, and this was sufficient to scatter their ranks in confusion. We lads closed in behind the horsemen to make the greatest show possible, and then it was we saw coming up from where the right flank of the enemy had been stationed, a party of thirty or forty, the greater portion of whom were negroes, all eager to participate in the victory.

So hotly did the "ragged regiment" press them, that instead of making a stand behind the slave quarters, the Britishers changed their line of retreat in order to gain the road, and such of our people as were mounted joined in the pursuit, for it was necessary to keep them on the run.

"There is no need for us who are on foot to do further battle," I heard a voice from out the darkness say when our troopers, driving the redcoats before them, had gained the highway. "It is best we remain here, where, in case the king's men come to their senses, we can hold a shelter for our people."

Then it was that, coming up to the speaker, I saw Master Sinclair, and in my astonishment at finding him there asked him from whence he came.

"I have been yonder, near the grape arbors, and it strikes me I was of considerable assistance in this little affair. The negroes handled their muskets and stood their ground better than I had believed possible."

"But where did you come *from,* and how did it chance that you abandoned your home, leaving

everything at the mercy of the enemy?" I cried, so curious for a solution of what had been a mystery that I could wait no longer for an answer.

"Word was brought yesterday morning by one of the field-hands that the redcoats were coming in large numbers, and I beat a retreat into the swamp with family, overseers, and slaves, there to wait until the enemy should have passed, for my Lord Clinton has announced his intention of sending me to the prison-ships as soon as I am taken. Hearing the noise of the battle, it was only natural that such of my company as could bear arms should be pressed into service, and it seems as if we were fortunate in selecting the time and position."

Before I could ask any more questions two horsemen came riding up the lane from the direction in which our people had followed the foe, and I shouted to the Minute Boys to stand firm, fearing lest by some odd chance the Britishers had doubled back on us, when a dear, familiar voice rang out:

"It is I, William Rufus! It is I, Gabriel!" and added to these welcome words were others which set my pulses throbbing with gratitude to the good God, for it was Archie Gordon who shouted laughingly:

"Ay, close up, lads, and stand ready to receive your commander!"

In a twinkling they were with us, and as we stood there among the dead and wounded of the enemy, we listened to the stories told in fragments of how they had succeeded in getting away, when

humanity should have prompted us first to minister to the needs of those whom we had crippled.

Gabriel's story seemed pitifully weak as compared with what we had imagined it might be. Creeping down the stairs in the darkness, he had made his way past the rooms filled with British officers, who had feasted so deeply as to give no heed to anything going on around them, and, having departed from the building by the rear door, he walked boldly toward the road, seeing only two men on guard, who gave no heed to him, most like because he had come from the house, therefore they believed he was one of their number. Then he had to travel no more than two miles before coming to the general's halting-place by the side of the road, where he awaited some report from us. The rest we already knew.

Archie's story was not unlike that of our leader's. As he laughingly said, the most difficult portion of his task was to escape from us, for once he was on the stairs the way was as clear as it had been for Gabriel, and when the lads had come to an end of their tales I understood that but for my timorousness we might all have gotten away without hindrance.

"Ay, so you might, lad," Gabriel said when I had given words to my thoughts; "but in case of having done so, you would not have been here to pour in a fire upon the enemy's rear, and, therefore, might the battle have been prolonged until it would have been our need to retreat."

There was no little gratification in the thought

that even though I had shown myself more timorous than one in command of a company of Minute Boys should be, such failure to display courage, if so be you choose to call it, had been an advantage rather than otherwise.

While we lads were thus conversing, Master Sinclair had taken charge of his dwelling once more. The negroes were sent to call up the women from the swamp, and soon it was the same hospitable mansion I had known in the past, for its inmates were busied in ministering to the wants of the wounded enemy as much as to the needs of welcome friends.

We lads did a fair share of the nursing, and were yet at work on the gruesome task when the day had come. Verily had our victory been of moment, as we could see now.

Nearly all the horses belonging to the British troopers yet remained stabled where they were first left, and of stores we had as much as they brought with them, which was by no means inconsiderable. The only thing to mar our triumph at that moment was the fact that the pursuers were not yet returned, and who could say that the redcoats had not turned upon them, making prisoners of every gallant patriot?

"We have much to be thankful for. It is little less than ingratitude to look forward into the future for trouble," Master Sinclair said when I put into words the thoughts which were in my mind concerning our people. "Unless Francis Marion has changed since last I saw him, he will not lead his

followers into a place from which they cannot extricate themselves. Therefore, now that the wounded are in better hands than ours, let us enjoy ourselves at breakfast, for I am of the belief that it will not be my privilege to entertain many more guests in this house for some time to come."

"Why do you speak in that sad strain, Master Sinclair?" Gabriel asked, and the planter replied with a feeble attempt at a smile:

"Now indeed am I doing exactly what I warned you lads against — looking ahead for trouble. In my case, however, I have better reason for doing so than you, for from advices from Charleston and Georgetown, dated no later than the day before yesterday, I know beyond a peradventure that the enemy in this section of the country is so strong that it will be folly for us to attempt to stand before them. My Lord Clinton has ordered Tarleton to scour the Carolinas with his legion, and entrap or kill the 'Swamp Fox.'"

"Who may that be, sir?" Gabriel asked.

"None other than your brother, my lad, so-named because he has his rendezvous in the swamps. The British commander-in-chief thinks himself witty to bestow upon Marion the name of 'Swamp Fox,' and I venture to say that he will be longer riding down such a fox, than any he ever coursed in the old country."

I had not yet gathered in the full meaning of Master Sinclair's words when came the summons to breakfast, and right pleasant was it to sit down once more at a well-appointed table, for I had not

enjoyed such an opportunity since Charleston capitulated.

We were yet eating when the thud of horses' feet outside caused us to start up eagerly. Then we saw coming through the avenue of trees our "Swamp Fox," Captain Horry at his side, followed by those brave hearts who were ready to sacrifice even life itself for their country.

It is not needed I should make any attempt at describing the happiness which was ours that morning when we were Master Sinclair's guests!

We had better reason for feasting and excesses than those who had lately occupied this hospitable mansion in the absence of its owner, and yet we were temperate, for never one among us did more than satisfy his hunger. I had counted on hearing General Marion tell of the chase, and in what condition he left the redcoats; but to my surprise, no sooner was the meal finished than the captain, the commander, Master Sinclair, and mayhap half a dozen of the troopers, went to an adjoining apartment as if to hold a secret council.

"Now what may be going on?" Archie Gordon cried merrily. "It would seem to me that we could afford to spend this day in merrymaking, after having read the king a third reasonably strong lesson, yet it looks as if another campaign was being planned."

"But one far different from those we have participated in, lad," Gabriel said gravely, and I, not minded that he should make a kill-joy of himself at such a time, cried reproachfully:

"THEN WE SAW COMING THROUGH THE AVENUE OF TREES OUR 'SWAMP FOX.'"

"Is it well that the commander of the Minute Boys of South Carolina should wear a long face at the very moment when he has most reason to smile?"

"It is true we have reason for rejoicing," Gabriel replied with the same sombre look upon his face, "but it may be well for us not to spend overly much time in such manner. Have you already forgotten what Master Sinclair said regarding his advices from Charleston and Georgetown?"

"The words are yet in my mind," I replied laughingly, "as is also the memory of Major Gainey's and Captain Barfield's commands, which gave us but little trouble although General Marion rode with no more than forty men. Now, when he has a legion at his back, what can Tarleton hope to do?"

"You must remember that Tarleton has all the British army behind him," Gabriel replied, and then he was interrupted by the return of those who had gone into council.

CHAPTER XI

OUR RETREAT

WHEN General Marion reëntered the room where we boys were yet at table, he gave the word for his followers to be assembled in front of the dwelling, speaking not until this had been done. Then, standing on the veranda in front of the force, he began in a tone and with the manner of a man who says that which is disagreeable to himself:

"My men, it is the opinion of all in command, as well as those whose judgment is entitled to the greatest respect, that we return without delay to Snow's Island; and I ask you to have confidence in us who have arrived at this decision, which is as distasteful to those who made it as it is to those who hear it. We know beyond a question that, because of what has been done, the British commander is determined to wipe us out, and it behooves us to gain a position which may be held against so large force as will be sent from the coast.

"Nothing can be accomplished by staying here, where capture or death must be the inevitable result; but so long as we remain at liberty so long will the Cause live, and I promise that however unpleasant and apparently disastrous may seem this

move at the very moment when we have been victorious, you shall yet have many opportunities of striking a blow at British uniforms. I ask you to obey cheerfully and without question, believing this plan has not been decided upon without due deliberation."

"We are to retreat," Gabriel whispered in my ear, and at the same moment a groan was heard from all the assembled men.

It is well I should dwell upon this scene. Our force was no greater than five hundred when all who counted themselves as troopers had come together, and here were two hundred or more who could not repress their sorrow because, while they were threatened, as Master Sinclair had every proof, by more than three thousand well-armed men, the greater portion of whom were trained soldiers, the word had been given to fall back. This was good evidence of the spirit of patriotism which animated the hearts of the people of the Carolinas, that these brave fellows were dissatisfied only because of not being brought face to face with an enemy who could conquer them by sheer force of numbers. If the Cause of Liberty was crushed out elsewhere, it yet lived and burned with an ardent flame in the hearts of those who had pledged themselves to follow General Marion, and among these patriots we Minute Boys of South Carolina had the good fortune to be numbered.

When we rode out from Sinclair's plantation knowing beyond a peradventure that we were fleeing before the enemy, while none would have

openly questioned General Marion's judgment in such matters, there were many who grumbled because of not being allowed to make a stand when there could be no hope of resisting successfully the overwhelming numbers which were already in motion against us.

Master Sinclair remained behind because his house and the negro huts were well filled with wounded men whom he would not abandon, whatever might be the cost of playing the Good Samaritan. And here let me stop sufficiently in this poor story to say that when Tarleton's legion arrived at the Sinclair plantation, two days later, they not only burned all the buildings, but sent Master Sinclair to the prison-ships in Charleston harbor, apparently giving no heed to the fact that, save for his desire to minister to the wounded Britishers, he might have made good his escape.

It must not be supposed that we Minute Boys had, even during the heat of the battle just fought, forgotten that traitorous cur, Seth Hastings. As a matter of fact he had been in our minds all the while, and more than once did we speak of him, but because no one had seen the young villain, we came to believe he was returned to Charleston, where he might remain under the protection of those whose cause he had espoused apparently only that he might work harm to his native land. Therefore it was we counted him the same as having escaped our vengeance, and were forced to content ourselves with the hope that the time might come when we could give him his just deserts.

The ride was indeed a sad one for all. Once we were gone, our people in that section of the country would be left to the tender mercies of the British and Tories, who had in other parts of the Carolinas written their names in blood and flame. Even though we Minute Boys were yet lads, we were full grown in the knowledge of what had been and what would come, therefore we were bowed down by sorrow as we set our faces in that direction which would lead us away from home.

Although not riding hard, we arrived at Snow's Island before morning, and after a brief time of rest for the horses as well as the men, instead of setting about fortifying the camp, as we lads had supposed would be the case, it soon became evident that we were to retreat yet further. There seemed to be every evidence that General Marion had, for the time being, given over trying to harass the enemy.

Near about noon on the day of our arrival at the island all the members of the "ragged regiment" were drawn up in line, and much to their surprise the following order was given by the general:

"All married men, and those who are the only support of a family, are commanded to return to their homes without delay, and there remain until such time as they shall be summoned for further work."

There was a deal of grumbling and discontent because of this disbanding of the force at the very time when it seemed we were most needed; but

both General Marion and Captain Horry held firm, obliging each man to disclose whether or no he had helpless ones depending upon him, and in case of an affirmative answer he was directed to stand aside. Thus it was our ranks were weeded out until no more than sixty, including us Minute Boys, were left.

Those who were to return to their homes were directed to take as much of the provisions which we had captured from the enemy, as could be conveniently carried, and the remainder of the plunder was packed in convenient form for transportation on our led horses, we having by this time even more of such animals than could well be cared for.

An hour before sunset the encampment on Snow's Island was abandoned, and the command dispersed in one direction and another, as I have said, leaving sixty or thereabouts yet in service.

It was a mournful parting, when we had crossed the stream and there separated. Many of those who were commanded to return to their homes had already pleaded in vain with the commander for permission to remain, but all their entreaties were in vain, and I believe of a verity I have never seen a more disconsolate lot of men than those comrades of ours who were obliged to turn their backs upon danger and privation.

When we rode forward once more, General Marion and Captain Horry leading the way, it was whispered from one to another that our destination was the Black Mingo Swamp. It seemed incredible to me that we were to go into North Carolina,

leaving our native State absolutely unprotected; but such proved to be the case, for after riding four and twenty hours with no more than three halts by the way, we were come to the place which had been decided upon as our refuge.

It was by no means to be despised as an encampment by those who feared an attack. To come upon it one was forced to traverse a narrow trail, where a misstep on one side or the other would plunge horse and rider into mire and water, for a distance of two and a half miles, when the traveller came upon a slight elevation of not more than four or five acres of solid ground, on which grew perhaps twenty gigantic oaks.

It was old Peter who guided us to this place, and truly had he led us to a safe refuge, for none might come upon our company save he who was perfectly familiar with the devious windings of the blind trail. Had we been closely pursued by the enemy, then was this a welcome spot, but since our success had been so great, and the redcoats, when we left Sinclair's plantation, yet some distance in the rear, I failed to understand, as did all the Minute Boys, why we were thus hiding when it might have been possible to save many of our people from cruel treatment.

It was a question which puzzled us not a little, as may be supposed, and we turned the matter over and over among ourselves during the first night in the new camp, until it was as if our curiosity could no longer be restrained. Therefore when Archie Gordon suggested what seemed a simple plan by

which we might learn what we were so eager to know, without being accused of unsoldierly conduct, all the lads insisted it should be carried out.

Archie had argued that, because Gabriel was the general's brother, there was no good reason why he might not ask for an explanation of our movements, doing so wholly on the plea of kinship, and not that we as a company had any right to question the movements of the commander.

Gabriel was not averse to doing what he might toward gratifying our curiosity, and at the earliest possible moment sought an interview with the general, leaving the remainder of us Minute Boys to put up a hut similar to the one we had built at the last encampment.

When he returned half an hour later we gathered around him eagerly, and he told us in substance, although in not the exact words which I have set down, that our commander and Captain Horry believed it would be unwise to remain in South Carolina while the chase was conducted with such spirit, for further attacks upon the enemy would result in the entire country being laid waste. It was to avoid this wholesale destruction of property and consequent sufferings of the people, that General Marion had decided to take refuge in the Black Mingo Swamp, but he counted on remaining there only until the pursuit had in a certain degree been abandoned, when all the members of his command would be summoned for duty, and we find ourselves with plenty of work cut out for us.

Gabriel's interview with his brother proved to be of considerable more importance than that of gratifying our curiosity.

The general stated as his belief that we might be forced to remain inactive for several weeks, and during that time it was in the highest degree necessary he should have full information concerning what was being done in the country roundabout. To such end he intended to send out two small parties as scouts, three or four men forming one company, and an equal number of the Minute Boys the other. These scouts were to remain absent eight and forty hours, one squad setting off four and twenty hours in advance of the other, thereby ensuring a report at least once every day.

It goes without saying that this information pleased us wondrously, for it would have been heart-sickening to remain there idle while knowing that the king's hirelings were working their will among our people, and even though we might not have an encounter with them, there was a sense of satisfaction in knowing that we were at least doing something in the way of maintaining a hold upon our own homes, however feeble it might be.

Even while Gabriel was repeating to us the conversation which had passed between his brother and himself, three of the men rode out through the swamp under the guidance of old Peter, and we knew that the first party of scouts had begun the work of gathering information. Then came the question as to which of our company should first go on this duty.

As a matter of course every fellow was eager to be up and doing as soon as possible, and it would have been unfair had Gabriel made any selection when one had as good a right as another to be foremost in the work.

It was Archie Gordon's proposition that we draw lots for the coveted task, and in order that there might be no question as to the fairness of this method, old Peter was called up as soon as he came back from guiding the men, to prepare seventeen twigs, three of which should be shorter than the others, and those who drew these last were to comprise the first scouting party.

If I had been given the privilege of naming these fortunate ones the matter could not have turned more to my satisfaction, for, oddly enough, Gabriel, Archie, and myself drew the shortened twigs. However much the others might grumble because they were to remain idle in camp eight and forty hours, there could be no question as to the fairness of the award.

It can well be fancied with what care we groomed the horses selected for the journey, and how critical we were in selecting weapons, portioning out the ammunition, or making up packages of provisions sufficient to last us two days. We completed this work before sunset, and then had nothing to do save wait until the following noon, for it was the general's desire that each scouting party should leave twenty-four hours later than the preceding one.

It seemed to me as if the time would never come,

so heavily did the moments lag, and I dare venture to say we three lads were in the saddle a half an hour before Captain Horry gave the word for old Peter to lead us out over the trail. No special orders had been given. We were simply to scout in whatsoever direction we chose, taking good care not to run such risks as might jeopardize our liberty, for the task set us was to gather information, without striking a blow, however tempting the opportunity.

It seemed wise to me that we travel toward the south, for in that direction not only lay home and friends, but the enemy as well, although there was little belief in our minds that we should come across the redcoats in this section of the country. It was reasonable to suppose, however, that the people living nearabout could give us word concerning what was being done, and more than that we did not hope.

There was a possibility, however, that we might come across one or more beggarly Tories who were striving to earn the reward my Lord Clinton had offered for the discovery of the general's hiding-place, and unless we found such cattle in too large numbers, we were instructed to make them prisoners in order to prevent their carrying back any word which would be of value to the enemy.

Therefore it was we rode along the banks of the Waccamau River until late in the afternoon, our faces turned toward Williamsburg District. Then, as we halted to give our steeds a chance to drink,

Archie said as he dismounted and began to unloose the girths of his saddle:

"Since we cannot expect to gain any information which may be of value during the night, why should we not halt here rather than four or five miles farther on?"

We were the more ready to agree to his proposition because of having remained in the saddle sufficiently long to cramp our limbs, and therefore it was that our scout came to end, for the time being, hardly fifteen miles from the starting-point. We picketed our horses in a clump of bushes forty or fifty feet from the road over which we had been riding, and then, partaking sparingly of our provisions, stretched ourselves at full length on the ground near the animals.

How it chanced that we three remained there without speaking I cannot explain, but because of our silence we were enabled to accomplish that which had seemed improbable. The sun was already setting when faintly from the distance, but sounding nearer and nearer each instant, came the thud of horses' hoofs, causing us to hastily seek better concealment. In due time we saw coming up the bank of the stream from the south, a party of seven armed men, or so it seemed, who were making their way with a certain degree of caution, which told that they were in search of something or some one.

Although not absolutely certain, we felt reasonably sure these travellers were enemies; but when the party passed near where we were in hiding they

ceased conversation, and therefore we had no means of determining who they were, save that all whom we could see from our place of concealment wore British accoutrements, while our people held to the powder-horn and shot-pouch.

Not until they were lost to view in the distance did either of us speak, and then it was Archie who said, much as if he had made an important discovery:

"They are Tories, and searching for General Marion's encampment!"

"I allow all that to be true, lad, and now what may be our duty?" Gabriel asked, as if questioning himself, whereupon I said, without giving weight to the words:

"We should learn where they halt for the night, and then carry the information back to camp."

"What say you, Archie?" and I saw from the expression on Gabriel's face that he had already formed some plan in his mind.

"I believe we have been sent out to learn whatsoever we may concerning just such people as those who have passed, and therefore, it seeming reasonable they will halt for the night shortly, we ought to creep up on them, for surely some word will be dropped during their conversation which will give us an idea of what they are about."

"And in case we learn beyond question that they are Tories?" the dear lad continued with a smile on his face which told me more positively his mind was already made up as to our proper course.

"That is for you to say," Archie replied.

"Surely Rufus and I have no right to dictate to the commander of the Minute Boys."

"I had supposed we were three scouts working together, and one of the same rank as another," Gabriel said quietly, "but howsoever you put it, this plan which I have in mind must be agreed to by both, else I shall abandon it. It seems to me, in case we learn that those fellows are Tories, we may safely count on their having been sent out to discover where the general is in hiding, and therefore it seems our duty to carry them into camp lest they learn more than may be advantageous to us."

"But they are seven to three," Archie replied, without giving himself time to realize he was suggesting that which might imply fear on his part.

"Ay, so they are; but did you hesitate to hold with the troop when we made the attack upon Major Gainey, where we were outnumbered six or eight to one?"

"I have no care as to the numbers," Archie replied, coloring deeply as he understood that he had spoken unwisely. "I am agreed on capturing the party, and will do my full share."

"Of that there is no doubt," Gabriel said, clapping him on the shoulder in a friendly fashion, lest there be somewhat of irritation in his mind. "We will leave our horses here, and follow those fellows to where they have encamped for the night, unless it so be they go too far before halting."

There was no need for argument, because we were all eager for such an adventure as would redound to our credit, and after making certain that

the horses were securely picketed, we set off up the road until coming to a point where freshly broken twigs of bushes told that they had struck across country.

There is less difficulty in successfully stalking a man than a deer, and this last had all three performed time and time again until it seemed like a simple task.

We pressed forward as rapidly as was consistent with silence, until coming so close upon their heels that it was possible for us to hear them making their way through the underbrush, and then followed at equal pace until such sounds came to us as told that they had halted.

Now it was only a matter of waiting, which under almost any circumstances is a difficult task to perform patiently, yet every lad who has hunted wild turkeys is well schooled in such work, and it can safely be said that we did not risk a valuable opportunity by being over eager.

The strangers having advanced with but little caution, seemed to realize the fact that there might be enemies in the vicinity, for they refrained from building a camp-fire, and thus rendered our work rather more difficult than it otherwise would have been.

After it was certain they had settled down for the night, we crept nearer and nearer until it was possible to distinguish words spoken in an ordinary tone, when we remained motionless and silent, straining our ears to catch that which should tell

us of what complexion were those whom we had tracked.

They talked of this thing and of that; sometimes as to the good points of their horses, and again of the make of saddle most suited to a rider, never saying anything to give us a clue as to their purpose until nearly two hours had passed, when the conversation turned upon the next day's journey, one of them saying carelessly:

"There is little likelihood we shall come across any rebels during the next two or three days' march, for all the people around about here are loyal to the king, therefore may we ride as fast as we please to-morrow."

This was all we heard betokening their intentions, yet the words were sufficient to tell what we desired to learn. There could no longer be any doubt that they were searching for the "ragged regiment," incited to such task, most likely, by the rewards which had been offered by the British for reliable information concerning the whereabouts of the "Swamp Fox."

It would have been a simple matter for us to capture a certain number of the party, but in order to do our work thoroughly it was necessary we take even the last one, for if either escaped us, then would the word be carried back that General Marion was in the vicinity of this camp, because none save he would venture thus to brave the anger of the king's troopers. Therefore it behooved us to take every precaution lest a single man slip between our fingers.

We waited fully two hours after the last sound of conversation had died away, and then was it certain, if the strangers were counting on sleeping that night, their eyes were closed in rest.

Gabriel motioned for us to follow him, and we did so knowing full well that upon the strict silence in which we made our way all the success of the adventure depended.

After creeping for five minutes or more so cautiously that not a twig snapped beneath our weight, we came to the small cleared place which the strangers had selected as an encampment, and even in the gloom could see that they were sleeping near the foot of a pine-tree that had been overturned by the wind. The overhanging mass of roots formed a certain shelter which served to protect them from the dew. Their rifles were stacked against one of the bushes at a distance of no more than three yards from where they lay, and, as a matter of course, it was first necessary to secure possession of these.

I would have moved on in advance in order to do this most important portion of the work, but that Gabriel held me back, himself taking the lead, and when Archie and I were come within perhaps a dozen paces of the sleepers, we halted until our comrade rose up from behind the bushes with the muskets in his arms.

Then we stood erect, our weapons levelled full upon the unconscious men, and Gabriel cried in a loud voice:

"You have come to an end of your work as far

as hunting rebels is concerned, and now yield yourselves prisoners or we shall fire!"

The strangers half-rose, staring about them stupidly, not understanding for several seconds the true situation of affairs, and while they were trying to gather their scattered senses it was impossible for me to restrain a cry of joy and exultation, for among them was none other than that cur we had so long been seeking, Seth Hastings.

At the very moment when we had given over, for the time being, all hope of coming upon that traitorous lad, he was in our power. We had searched for him in this encampment of the enemy and that, but without succeeding in our purpose, and now, when making what appeared an unimportant capture, we had the scoundrel at our mercy.

He did not recognize us at first, as I understood by the grayish hue of fear which came over his face a few seconds after he opened his eyes, and then, glancing from one to the other only to see those whom he would have so cruelly wronged, the Tory villain sank back as if fearing we were about to wreak vengeance upon him then and there.

His surprise was no less than ours, and had his companions kept their wits about them, observing closely all our movements, they might have succeeded in effecting their escape while we stared at the lad in mingled surprise and joy.

However, exultation soon gave way before the knowledge of what we had yet to accomplish, and we set about making certain that those whom we held at our mercy could not give us the slip.

It can well be understood that Seth Hastings was the first to whom we gave our attention. Archie and Gabriel stood with levelled muskets while I advanced unarmed to search the prisoners for concealed weapons, and bind them in such fashion that they could not run. When I came to that Tory cur he gave me a look which told how greatly it would pleasure him to take my life, and I laughed aloud as I realized the impotence of his rage.

"Be careful, Seth Hastings, not to make any sudden move, or I shall take it as an indication that you intend mischief, and fire with true aim," Archie cried, and again I saw the pallor of fear creep over the cur's face. He could plan to send to the prison-ships three lads who had never done him injury, and yet cringe with cowardly fear when there was possibility his own precious body might come to harm.

I found on the scoundrel two pistols, which no doubt had been loaned or given by whatsoever British officer had sent him in search of us. These I put in my own pocket, as a matter of course, saying as I did so:

"We rebels are not in the way of getting such fanciful weapons as these, and ought to thank you for bringing the toys so far."

"I will bring you worse than that, Rufus Randolph, before many days have passed," he said in a low, vindictive tone, and I laughed while fastening his arms behind him with his own belt.

"It will be necessary for you to give us the slip before it is possible to work any more of your Tory

mischief, and I am of the opinion that we shall hold you fast until it is decided whether you be hanged as you deserve, or put to death in some other way."

Such words were much like striking a fellow when he was down; but I could not resist the temptation after all that young villain would have done to us, and as if he thought I was lingering too long over the task Gabriel cried:

"Remember that we have much to do this night, Rufus Randolph, therefore it stands you in hand to finish that work as quickly as possible."

There was a certain tone of reproof in his voice, and I realized that it was merited, for I had no right to indulge myself at such a time, therefore the remainder of the work was performed with utmost despatch. Ten minutes later our seven prisoners, their arms fastened behind them by straps around each elbow, were lifted on to their horses, and by way of further precaution we tied their ankles to the stirrups.

Then we set out for the place where we had left our steeds, pushing forward with all speed, for it was in the highest degree important, or so it seemed to us, that we should regain the camp in the Black Mingo Swamp before sunrise next morning, lest these Tories have friends near about who might make an effort at rescue.

CHAPTER XII

A MYSTERIOUS ESCAPE

AFTER my cowardly words to Seth Hastings — for it was cowardly to threaten a helpless prisoner as I had done — the young traitor shut his mouth closely, showing by the expression on his face that he was not minded to exchange words with us, and straightway I had somewhat less of contempt for the fellow, because he was displaying a certain amount of courage, when I had believed him to be the veriest cur that ever went unhanged.

The other prisoners had not spoken since that moment when they understood how completely we had them in our power, and for this silence I was thankful, because immediately we were ready to retrace our steps there came into my mind a great fear lest they might have friends in the vicinity who could turn the tables, thus preventing us from going back to camp with proof that we were able to play the part of men.

As a matter of course, Gabriel took the lead, as was his right, since we had made him our commander, and he was not the kind of a lad who loiters when there is work to be done. He marched rapidly at the head of our party, leaving to Archie and me the task of guarding the prisoners, and there is little need for me to say that we did our portion

of the task properly, for the slightest carelessness at such a time might cost us our liberty, if not our lives.

"Do not hesitate to shoot with good aim at the first who makes the least move at attempting to escape," the lad had said as we set out with horses and prisoners through the underbrush, speaking sufficiently loud for all to hear, and we answered properly, although there was little we could have done on the instant had the prisoners turned rusty, owing to the fact of being loaded down with the captured weapons.

I was carrying my own musket and two of those taken from the prisoners, Archie's burden was the same as mine, while Gabriel had charge of the remainder of the booty, therefore for one of us to have fired quickly, in case there was need, would have been well-nigh impossible.

However, the prisoners were firmly secured on their horses, and there was no possibility they could do anything toward effecting their own release, therefore we had only to guard against a surprise by whoever might come upon us from the outside. Under other circumstances we would have realized that there was little fear of our being discovered by enemies in that place; but, nervous as we were through fear that it might not be possible to regain the encampment with all our spoils of war, even the rustling of the branches in the night air sounded to our ears like the tramp of men, and more than once did the flight of a night bird cause Gabriel to halt our party in order that he might reconnoitre.

How long that short march seemed to me! It was as if it would never end, and more than once before we had come upon the place where our horses had been tethered did I say to myself that Gabriel had mistaken the direction. I dare say, however, that we covered the distance in a reasonably short time, and great was my relief, even though we were by no means out of the woods, when we arrived at our first halting-place.

"It is not for us to linger here," Gabriel said when Archie stacked his burden of weapons against the trunk of a tree as if preparing for a long halt. "We have yet many miles to cover before sunrise, for I am not minded to travel in the daytime if it can be avoided."

"You can't start any too soon to please me," Archie replied grimly; "but there is no good reason why I should hold on my shoulder this property of the king's while we are making ready for the journey. How do you count on carrying all the weapons?"

"Leave them here," I cried quickly. "It is not well we should burden ourselves with muskets when it is important to travel rapidly. Better lose all the weapons than fail to carry our prisoners to the general."

"There is no reason why we should lose anything," Gabriel replied quietly as he began saddling his horse. "We of the Colonies have too much need for weapons to waste any, and I am counting on carrying *all* our booty back to camp."

It irritated me because he should be thinking

about spoils of war when it was of such great importance that the prisoners be lodged where they could not give information concerning what had been learned since their capture, and I would have spoken sharply, but that Archie reminded me of my duty as a soldier by saying cheerily:

"It's for you to say, captain, and we'd be mighty poor Minute Boys if we kicked against any orders you may be pleased to give."

By using ropes made of twisted vines, we fastened the muskets to the back of our saddles in such a manner that they would not be likely to catch in the bushes while we rode through the underbrush, and no more than five minutes were spent in thus making ready. Then the prisoners' horses were fastened by their bridle-reins, head and tail, in a fashion which would force each animal to keep the pace set by the leader, and the steed rode by the foremost, which was Seth Hastings, was to be led by Gabriel.

My post was immediately in the rear, where I could keep sharp watch of the entire line, and Archie rode midway the column to make certain the prisoners were not trying to wriggle out of their bonds. It would not be possible for us to travel swiftly in this fashion, but however necessary it might be to make haste, there was infinitely more need to prevent the escape of a prisoner, for if even one gave us the slip he could carry to the Britishers news of our whereabouts as well as if the whole boiling got away.

"Keep your eyes and ears open," Gabriel said

warningly, as he urged his horse forward, forcing the entire line to move, and at a walk we made our way through the underbrush until coming to the road, when, with a word of warning that the pace was to be increased, Gabriel pushed forward at a sharp trot.

It must have been a disagreeable ride for those who were tied in their saddles, but we gave little thought to their discomforts, and even though we had, I question if we would have made any great effort to relieve men who had been trying to work us all possible harm.

Now it was we took the chances that there might be enemies in front of us, for instead of making any effort to learn if the way was clear, we rode on at our best pace without regard to the possibility, all three of us believing that unless we could regain the encampment before another day came the danger would have increased tenfold.

Twice did we stop to give the horses water, but at such times no conversation was indulged in. One of the eldest of the Tories would have asked how much farther he must ride thus strapped to the saddle, but Gabriel sharply told him to hold his peace, else would we gag all the party, and from that on, until we were arrived, never one of the renegades ventured to wag his tongue.

During such time as I was not looking into the future with fear and trembling lest in the very moment of our triumph we should be cut off by friends of the prisoners, I was hugging to my heart the joyful thought that at last we had Seth Has-

tings in our power. The cur had done all he might to compass our death, and while there was no idea in my mind as to how we could punish him properly, I was determined that he should not escape due penalty of his crimes.

The gray light of coming day had but just appeared in the eastern sky when we were challenged by the sentinels at the edge of the Black Mingo Swamp, and the journey had been performed in good shape. It was necessary we wait until some one could be summoned to guide us over the narrow trail, however, and during such time of idleness we were forced to tell our story in order to satisfy the curiosity of the troopers on guard, both of whom were strangers to me.

It was Gabriel who gave an account of our work, and when he was come to an end one of the men said, as he clapped the lad heartily on the knee:

"When I heard that you youngsters were setting yourselves up as Minute Boys I laughed at the idee, allowin' that it wouldn't be overly long before you got us, as well as yourselves, into some bloomin' scrape, but now I'm ready to take it all back. When a party of lads can go out on a scout, an' bring back with them every blessed Tory who was on our trail, it shows that we old ones ain't the whole thing in this 'ere one-sided fight. Keep up the good work, an' if it so be I hear any conceited soldier so much as breathin' loud agin what you may do, I'll read him a lesson."

Although it was sweet to hear such words of praise, and we were treated to very many, it was

with a sigh of relief that I saw old Peter's black face coming from out of the bushes to guide us across the swamp, and when he in turn would have insisted on knowing how we had been able to make such an important capture, I bade him hold his peace until we were safe within the encampment.

The troopers were at breakfast when we rode in among them, and every man's mouth was open so wide with astonishment at seeing what we had brought that never a word was spoken until General Marion, coming up as we dismounted, said as he laid his hand affectionately on Gabriel's shoulder:

"I knew full well you lads would give a good account of yourselves whenever the opportunity offered. Captain Horry will look after the prisoners, while you join us at the morning meal, for it stands to reason that you are in need of food as well as rest. The story of what you have done will keep until you are in the humor for telling it, though one question is necessary: Did you leave behind any who may carry information to the enemy?"

"We took all that were in sight," Archie cried gleefully, not waiting for Gabriel to make reply, and Captain Horry clasped me by the hand as he said in a low tone:

"You Minute Boys have begun well, and I doubt not but that you will keep up the work; the best troopers in our 'ragged regiment' could not have done better, as it now seems."

Then he turned to take charge of our prisoners, who looked as if they might drop from the saddles

with fatigue but for the bonds which held them firmly in place, and Gabriel said, as he followed his brother:

"Kindly have especial care of Seth Hastings, captain! We have been a long while in bringing him to book, and it would be a grievous disappointment if he should give us the slip now."

"You need have no fear," the captain replied with a laugh. "I'll answer for it that never one of them leaves this swamp until it is our good pleasure to have him go."

I delayed until seeing the Tories and our traitor led away by three men whom the captain had summoned with a gesture, and then I joined my comrades, who had already begun to eat of the food before them as if on the verge of starvation.

How happy we were then! How much of praise did we receive as the story was told, thus showing that we had brought into camp every person found on our journey against whom suspicions might be entertained!

Before we had finished breakfast the scouts who were to go out in our stead made ready for the work, and their comrades bade them look well to the laurels of the "ragged regiment," for if they returned without as much to show for the time spent as we Minute Boys had brought in, then would it be no more than right we lads take charge of the entire troop because of having shown ourselves better soldiers.

After this time of story-telling and jesting had passed, and certain it is we of the Carolinas had

little opportunity in those days to display gay spirits, we lads — meaning all the Minute Boys — went to the outer edge of the encampment that we might make certain our prisoners had been safely confined.

Surely we had little reason to complain that Captain Horry had not attended to his portion of the work in proper fashion. The captives were each secured to a tree by the same bond which confined his elbows, and while he might change his position somewhat when his limbs were cramped, certain it was that no one could free himself unaided.

Seth Hastings looked up at us from under his eyebrows as we approached, and if his look could have killed, then had we been stricken dead on the instant. I never saw a more deadly expression of hatred on any person's face than darkened his, and yet we had not attempted to do him a wrong — we had been his friends up to the very moment when he tried to compass our undoing. Some such thought as this was in my mind as I came up to where the young traitor was held by his bonds, and asked, with more of curiosity than malice in my voice:

"Why did you set yourself so suddenly against us, Seth Hastings? Why did you try to work our ruin at the very moment when we were proving our friendliness by proposing that you be our comrade?"

He did not answer for the moment, and Archie replied for him by saying:

"Because he is first cousin to the viper that stung the hand which warmed him. More times than can well be counted have I done that cur a good turn, and it was only two days before he would have delivered us to the Britishers, that I gave him food because he claimed to be hungry."

"Was I bound to turn rebel because you saw fit to do so?" Seth asked surlily, and Gabriel cried:

"How can you call a 'rebel' him who would simply defend his own home? If I mistake not, you cried out as loudly as any other against the king when we were besieged, and it seemed possible we of Charleston might be able to hold our own."

"All that might be, and yet had I the right to change my colors when it was seen that the rebellion was the same as crushed," Seth cried, and I fancied that his cheeks were reddened with shame even as he spoke.

"If it was in your mind to change colors, the manly way would have been to declare yourself, but instead of so doing you allowed us to think you had the welfare of the Carolinas at heart, in order that you might play the traitor more successfully," Gabriel said sternly, and then turning toward me he added, "It gives a decent lad a bad taste in the mouth to bandy words with the cur. Let us leave him alone till such time as we can decide how we may settle the score he has run up against himself."

"You do not dare do more than hold me prisoner of war!" the villain cried in fear, and Jared Green said with a laugh:

"By what right do you count yourself a prisoner of war, you traitorous Tory? Have you joined the king's forces?"

"Ay, that I have! You know as much without asking the question," and Seth looked imploringly toward his companions in captivity as if asking them to bear witness that he had been received by the Britishers as a soldier.

"Even the redcoats wouldn't take such as you in their ranks!" Archie cried sharply. "The only claim you can make is that you have promised every officer you came across to lead them to this encampment, when you knew no more about it than does my Lord Clinton."

"I came mighty near smoking you out," the cur cried in short-lived triumph. "It was me who showed these honest men the way."

"You told us that we were three full days' march from this place," one of the Tories said angrily. "If you had known half as much as you professed to be acquainted with, we would not now be in such a hobble."

"Let him alone, and come with me," Gabriel whispered. "I'm thinking his punishment has begun, for it is easily seen that the others are inclined to put on his shoulders all the blame for their plight, and they will say more harsh words to the scoundrel than we could devise."

Then Gabriel and I walked away, leaving two of the troopers on guard against any attempt at escape, and nearly all the Minute Boys followed, believing that now was come the time when we

would decide what should be the fate of the traitor we had captured.

Understanding what was in their minds, I grew uneasy lest that be done which might be a black mark against us as soldiers, for such we surely were then, even though by age we were forced to call ourselves boys. When Seth Hastings was at liberty, and we searching for him, it seemed to me as if there was no punishment we could deal out which would be too great for the injury he would have inflicted; but now that he was in our power I began to fear lest the lads would wreak such a vengeance as might cause us shame in after years. Much of that which was in my mind I repeated to Gabriel as we walked through the encampment, and he replied in a whisper:

"The general has the same fear, as he told me at the first opportunity after we arrived. He begs that we treat him as an ordinary prisoner, leaving aside our anger against him for a later time, when we are no longer seeking to serve our country as Minute Boys."

We did not have further chance for private converse. Our comrades began to clamor for judgment against the traitor, and it was necessary the matter be settled at once, else might some of the hotter-headed take it into their own hands to deal out punishment.

Gabriel was not disposed to waste any time, but, calling for the lads to follow him, led the way beyond the encampment, where we might discuss the

situation without fear of being overheard by the troopers.

I wish it was possible for me to set down all that was said when we discussed Seth Hastings's affairs, for then it would be seen how difficult it was for Gabriel and me to hold the Minute Boys in check. Archie Gordon was as insistent as any of the others that we take some signal revenge, claiming that since it was against him, as one of the original Minute Boys, Seth had first tried to do a grievous wrong, he had a right to name at least a third of the punishment to be inflicted.

"And what would you say should be done with him?" Gabriel asked.

"Give him plenty of time to realize what was coming, and then hang the cur to a tree till his miserable life was fled!"

Nor was Archie the most vindictive of our company. More than one believed we would be warranted in flogging him once each day for a week before putting him to death, and only two besides Gabriel and myself claimed that we had no right to pay off private scores while we professed to be serving the Colonies as soldiers.

Not until Gabriel had called for his brother to say what he believed right, did we succeed in stilling the cries for revenge, and even then the majority of our company claimed the right to do as they saw fit, without regard to the general's views, insisting that the traitor had shown his cloven foot before there was such an organization as the Minute Boys.

However, by noon we had silenced those who would have tortured the prisoner, even though without convincing them, and Gabriel whispered to me as the conference broke up:

"I am afraid some of our lads may take the matter into their own hands, and that be done which will cause us shame. Keep a sharp lookout on all hands this day, Rufus, and perhaps as time passes they may come to look at the matter more reasonably."

There could be no question but that Gabriel had cause for fear, as I saw when the discussion was at an end, for then, those who were disgruntled because of not being allowed to wreak signal vengeance on the traitor gathered by themselves at a considerable distance from their comrades, and because Archie Gordon was sorest among the soreheads, I followed him, insisting on discussing the question privately.

It was a long, difficult task, but I finally succeeded in gaining his promise that he would refrain from advocating harsh measures against the prisoner, but leave the matter in the hands of the general, where, as I claimed, and with good reason, it rightfully belonged.

"I will do as you say, Rufus, though it goes mightily against the grain to let that scoundrel off as if he had done nothing more than may be permitted an honest Tory — if, perchance, there be any of that breed who is honest."

"Better have it go against the grain, Archie, than do that which would cause you shame in the

years to come. General Marion will see to it that the cur does not go unpunished, and, as a matter of fact, he has the right to take charge of the affair since he is our commander, even though we claim to be an independent company."

From that time on, until nightfall, Archie did what he might toward inducing the other lads to give over their cry for revenge, and when the sun had set I believed that we need have no fear the traitor would be treated other than as a prisoner.

I question if there was one of our company who did not go several times during the evening to make certain our precious prisoners were securely guarded, and of a verity there seemed to be little fear they could give us the slip. In addition to being firmly bound, each to a tree, two of the troopers remained close at hand to watch every movement, and I said to Gabriel, when he and I went for the last time that night to assure ourselves of the vigilance of the sentinels and the strength of the bonds:

"There is no reason for us to fear that they will not be here in the morning, and because we had but little sleep last night, we shall be wiser to get what slumber we may now, rather than keep running to and fro, concerning ourselves with what the troopers will do in even better shape than we could."

Then we two lay down on the ground in that portion of the encampment which we claimed belonged to the company of Minute Boys, and certain it is that I wasted no time in falling asleep.

Another day had come when I opened my eyes, having been aroused by a violent outcry, and, arising lazily to a sitting posture, I asked with but little of curiosity:

"What's the meaning of all that disturbance?"

Before those who were nearest could make reply, even if they had been able to do so, Archie Gordon came running toward us at full speed, anger written on every feature of his face as he cried:

"Now we can understand why the general was so eager to prevent us from serving out that miserable traitor as he deserved! I was a blind fool for not having understood it all!"

"What has gone wrong, Archie?" Gabriel asked, as he rose to his feet, and the angry lad replied:

"Gone wrong? Everything, when men who claim to be soldiers turn their hands to aid one who would betray us to the Britishers! He was our prisoner, and no one, not even the general, had the right to set him free!"

"What do you mean? Who has been set free?" I asked impatiently, and Archie cried, his voice hoarse with rage:

"That cur — Seth Hastings, who would have been hanged long ere this had we not listened to your soft words!"

It can readily be understood that I was on my feet by this time, and when Gabriel set off at full speed toward where the prisoners had been last seen, I was close at his heels.

When we arrived it was to find fifteen or twenty

of the troopers moving about uneasily, as if having suddenly discovered there was a traitor in their midst, and the two men on duty as sentinels were endeavoring to explain that there had been no change in the situation since they went on guard.

"I did not think it necessary to count the prisoners," one of them said in a tone which carried conviction with it, "but I'll go bail that the mischief hasn't been done since three o'clock this morning. Perhaps those who had a grudge against the fellow have taken him away for purposes of their own," and he looked meaningly at Archie Gordon.

It was a full minute before I could get a view of the prisoners, and then I saw six men, who were striving unsuccessfully to prevent any sign of concern from appearing on their faces, each securely bound as on the evening previous; but the seventh — Seth Hastings — had disappeared, leaving behind him only the leather belt with which his arms had been pinioned.

"How does it come that the young traitor got away, while all the others are yet secure?" I cried, and one of the troopers replied with a meaning look at us lads:

"I reckon the Minute Boys have no need to ask questions. They had a score to settle with the lad who's missin', an' it stands to reason the account has been closed by this time."

There was no need to ask Archie Gordon if he had had any hand in the disappearance of Seth Hastings. He could not have simulated such anger as he had displayed since the escape was discovered,

and I felt positive the other members of the company would not have committed what had the look of a crime, more particularly after it had been agreed between us all that the Tory traitor be left in charge of our commander.

These thoughts had just formed themselves in my mind when General Marion came up, and it was possible to see that he had been seriously disturbed.

"Does any one here know aught concerning the escape?" he asked sharply, and after waiting a moment for a reply, added sorrowfully, "The success of that which we would do depends entirely upon our being true to each other. If we have one among us whose sympathies are with the Tories, or one willing to avenge private wrongs after having the same as passed his word to the contrary, then will it be impossible for us to be of any aid to South Carolina now in her time of deepest trouble and danger."

"I will answer for it that none of the Minute Boys has done this thing," Gabriel cried stoutly. "In the first place, we have not among us one who would thus break what is the same as his pledged word, and then again, it would have been impossible for a single lad to have left our hut without my knowledge, for I did not sleep overly well last night."

"Then is the matter even more serious than I had feared, for there is a traitor among us who have pledged our lives to the Cause, and while he remains undetected are we all in gravest danger."

With this the general walked away as if determined upon some course of action, and we Minute Boys remained staring at each other in fear and dismay.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SEARCH FOR THE TRAITOR

It goes without saying that we lads were furious at having lost the prisoner whom we had been so eager to take, but after talking the matter over with Captain Horry we forgot our own disappointment in a measure, as we understood more fully the meaning of that which the general had said.

That some one in the encampment had aided Seth Hastings to escape was positive, for all us Minute Boys had assured ourselves that the young traitor could not by any possibility remove his bonds, and this we did not only twice or three times during the day, but when we left him for the night.

It was equally certain the Tories could not have rendered any assistance, for they were as helpless as he, and therefore did the matter narrow down to two questions. The first, as to whether some of our company of Minute Boys, angered because the cur was to be treated as a prisoner of war, had taken him away in order to wreak vengeance; while the second and more serious was, in the event of our company being able to show that the Minute Boys had no hand in the matter, as to who had released the wretch.

It was indeed a serious matter in more ways than

one if Seth had been released and was now able to work us harm, because it was within his power to conduct the enemy over the trail which led across the swamp to our encampment.

More serious indeed than this last, was the fact that if the villain had found a friend in our encampment, then had we a traitor among us, and this possibility was sufficient to make even the most courageous tremble.

General Marion's plans were not kept secret from his followers, and if one was ready to do whatsoever he might against the Cause, then were the possibilities for mischief greater far than we could reckon.

Our company of Minute Boys were gathered in the camp we had built, discussing the matter, when Captain Horry came over to have a talk with us, and after he had gone we remained there until, considerably to our surprise, General Marion appeared.

He shook his head when we arose to our feet expecting he would enter, and said in a tone more grave than I had ever heard him use:

"I have no time to waste, lads, for it may be the situation demands immediate change of camp. It is of the highest importance that I know beyond a peradventure whether any of you Minute Boys, believing it your right to inflict punishment upon your own prisoner, have taken Seth Hastings away. I will not ask what you may have done with him; but this it is necessary for the safety of all I should know: Are any of you responsible for his absence? Do not answer now," he said, holding up his hand

as half a dozen of us rose to speak. "Discuss the matter among yourselves until you are thoroughly well convinced of the gravity of the situation, and then tell the truth like honest men. The question simply is if one of you know how the lad escaped? I shall expect an answer within half an hour."

With that the general walked away, and we remained silent and motionless, staring at each other, for already had we come to realize how dangerous was the position of this handful of men who yet remained true to the Cause if the scoundrel was at liberty, and I hoped sincerely that some of our fellows would be able to declare with truth that they had had a hand in his escape, for then would our position be far less perilous.

Gabriel put the question to all in such a way that I understood he had much the same thoughts as mine, and I fancied he, like me, was hoping, even though it would have been to the discredit of our company, that some of the lads had taken it upon themselves to punish the cur regardless of the pledge we had much the same as made.

Not a lad spoke in reply to the question as to whether any one could give information concerning Seth Hastings, and Gabriel said, pleading with the members of our company for the truth:

"The general has told us that he will put no other question than the one I have just asked, which is: 'Does any lad among us know how Seth Hastings got away?' We will drop all inquiry if one or more of you acknowledge having had a hand in his disappearance, and, so far as I am concerned,

gain most intense relief of mind, because then there can be no question that any of those who have pledged their services to the Cause under General Marion did so with traitorous intent."

No lad spoke, and Archie cried passionately:

"Put the question to each in turn, asking every lad to say on his oath as a Minute Boy, and as a native of the Carolinas, whether he knows aught concerning him."

"I solemnly swear that I did not see or have any communication whatsoever with Seth Hastings from the time I left him last night bound securely, and have no knowledge whatsoever of how he may have escaped or been spirited away," Gabriel said, answering first for himself, and then turning to me, put the same question, following it up by naming each lad in turn.

Thus it was we Minute Boys swore positively we had no hand whatsoever in the disappearance of the traitor, and I knew beyond a possibility of doubt that each and every one had spoken the truth.

Therefore it was there could be no longer any question but that among the men who had sworn to labor earnestly for the Cause was one who stood ready to do whatsoever he might against us. If you can picture to yourself our position, surrounded on every hand by redcoats and Tories who thirsted for our blood, — we the only persons in all the Carolinas who were ready to bear arms against the enemy, — you may have some faint idea of the con-

sternation, ay, the terror, which came upon us with such knowledge.

Gabriel lost no time in reporting to his brother the result of the questioning, and while he was absent we lads whispered among ourselves, speaking as people do in the presence of the dead, for already did it seem as if we were doomed.

Through the information that had been brought in by those who yet remained friendly to the Cause, we knew that Tarleton with his legion, and Colonel Wemyss in command of not less than a full regiment, were hot in pursuit of us, and if either of these forces should so surround our little band that retreat was impossible, then would we be cut down to the last man, for according to my Lord Clinton's proclamation, no mercy was to be shown — we were outlaws already doomed to death.

Before Gabriel returned, the scouts who had been sent out four and twenty hours in advance of us lads, returned bringing with them such a budget of news as would have raised our spirits to the highest notch, but for the fact that we had among us one who might not be trusted, and who he was it seemed impossible to learn.

Each man must perforce look at his neighbor with doubt, and those who were most devoted to the Cause could not but understand that they were liable at any moment to be suspected of traitorous design. It seemed to me as if the efficiency of the force must be weakened until it was possible to discover which of that devoted band was playing the Judas.

Now let me set down here what we learned from our lately returned scouts, the information covering all the time from the day when we set free the one hundred and fifty prisoners who refused, save in the case of a few true men, to join our force. Major Wemyss had marched seventy miles from Nelson's Ferry straight across the district of Williamsburg, devastating a path fifteen miles in breadth after such a merciless fashion that one would have said he had been taught in the school of the savage.

All the dwellings on his way, save those occupied by well-known Tories, were given to flames; the people were plundered of their possessions; such property as the troopers could not use was destroyed, while the animals were wantonly shot and allowed to rot where they fell; those who were thus plundered saw all of their buildings swept away by fire, and they, even to the women and children, were held forcibly back to prevent them from saving the smallest article of value.

Men were hung without a semblance of trial, and when their loved ones pleaded for mercy, the British soldiers rode them down. All the time it seemed almost as if the good God had forsaken the Colonies, yet we came to know that these acts of barbarous cruelty were necessary to arouse our people from the fear and despondency into which they had fallen.

The scouts reported that those men who had been lukewarm in the Cause, and yet were not Tories, had been aroused by these acts of wanton cruelty, and now asked only for an opportunity to make

reprisals and at the same time defend their homes. They were ready, so the information came, to join General Marion as soon as he should be willing to receive them, and even those who had been rescued at Nelson's Ferry and refused at the time to enlist, were now begging for an opportunity to bear arms against the foe.

Verily did it seem as if the people of the Carolinas had needed just such a lesson as the Britishers were eager to give them, in order that they might be taught their duty, and now has come the time when the "ragged regiment" could be recruited to a full battalion.

Save for the fact of that unknown traitor who lurked among us, we would have rejoiced exceedingly at the news brought in, for it told us that at last might it be possible for us to stand up like men against the foe, instead of being forced to skulk here and there, striking a blow only against small bands of Tories or detached squads of soldiers.

We lads speculated long and earnestly after hearing the reports of the scouts, as to what General Marion might decide upon doing, and before the sun set did we have an inkling of his plans, for then word was given that each man should provide himself with as much of provisions and ammunition as could be conveniently carried, to the end that he be ready for the march at a moment's notice.

Now, as Gabriel and I figured it out, and as a matter of course we could but little more than guess at what might be in the commander's mind, it had been decided we must continue the work while the

traitor remained a member of the force, for it would be impossible to ferret him out, because if the question was put, as it had been to us lads, to the other members of the company, he who was ready to sell his country to the enemy would be loudest in protesting his innocence.

It was a great risk to run, thus setting off with one in our midst who was looking for every opportunity to betray us, and yet no other course could be pursued. We might not remain even in hiding now that Seth Hastings was escaped to tell what he knew concerning our whereabouts.

The encampment in the Black Mingo was abandoned in much the same fashion as had been the one at Snow's Island, save that in this instance we left no men behind to guard the plunder, for it would have been dooming them to death in case Seth Hastings led any force to that place. Whatsoever we had there that could not be carried away on our saddles, must fall into the hands of the enemy, since we could not guard it.

It was two hours before sunset when word was given to break camp, and little did we lads, as we climbed into the saddle, dream of the exhausting march before us.

I might fill many pages with words descriptive of what we suffered, but must leave it to the imagination of him who reads these lines, simply stating that during the succeeding three days and three nights we made no more of halts than was absolutely necessary in order to keep the animals up to their work; at times so stiff and lame that it was

with difficulty we could remain in the saddle, and on dismounting required assistance before it was possible to take our position in the line.

I question if many of us could have withstood such a physical strain, but for the fact that here and there, as we rode along, our force was joined by men who had hitherto been lukewarm in the Cause yet were now burning with that same desire which had animated us, and this knowledge, that the people of the Carolinas were at last awakening from the lethargy which had come upon them when the redcoats overran the land, gave us a certain fictitious strength to hold out until the end of the journey.

The end came when we were once more on the banks of Lynch's Creek, where were gathered no less than four hundred well-armed men waiting for the commander whom they knew full well would lead them wheresoever the enemy might be found, regardless of the dangers.

Here it was, while we lay upon the ground absolutely helpless after the long march, that we learned of the work which lay near at hand, and if it was to be performed, must be begun with the least possible delay, so it appeared to us. These new recruits told us that Colonel Wemyss had retired to Georgetown, weary with chasing the "Swamp Fox," and a body of six hundred well-armed Tories, under the command of Captain John Bell, were encamped only fifteen miles below us on the bank of the creek.

Now it must be understood that we had arrived

at this halting-place when the afternoon of the third day was about half-spent, and I venture to say that of all our company who had come from the Black Mingo, none save the commander himself, and, possibly, Captain Horry, had been able to hold their eyes open, so heavily did slumber weigh upon them. Yet these two, quite as much fatigued as any of the others, had such devotion to their country, that instead of giving themselves up to the repose which was so sadly needed, turned all their attention, regardless of bodily weariness, toward mapping out for that very night another blow to be struck against those who were devastating the Carolinas.

That General Marion was considerate of those who followed him, ever ready to take upon himself the brunt of all the hard knocks, is shown by the fact that not until near midnight did he and Captain Horry set about wakening us, who lay in a deep sleep of fatigue like unto dead men. It was necessary that some of the men be dragged around roughly, and even lifted to their feet, before the chain of slumber was shaken off. As a matter of fact, I saw a trooper mounting his horse, having saddled him while his eyes were closed, and I believe of a verity the man was even then moving unconsciously in his sleep.

When we were mounted, however, General Marion awakened us most thoroughly by saying in that clear, ringing voice of his, which was like unto a trumpet:

"Hardly more than two hour's ride from this en-

campment is a force of those renegades whom we call Tories. They outnumber us slightly, but even though they were twice as many, I believe you who have served so gallantly since I came into the Williamsburg district could whip them in open field. We are told that recruits are flocking from every quarter to this section to join us, and by waiting we may double our strength, yet it is possible the enemy might take alarm if given too much time. Therefore have I proposed that we march at once to strike such a blow as shall give Tarleton and Wemyss to understand that the spirit of liberty has been revived, rather than broken, by their butcheries and barbarities."

A ringing cheer, in which every man participated, was the answer to this speech, and more than that no commander could need.

It is not my intention to linger long over that which we did on this night, however much pride I could have in the telling. If I am to set down what we Minute Boys did before the invaders were driven from the soil, then must I hurry over this action, else shall I find myself cut short for lack of space before the tale is really come to an end. Therefore it is that I propose to copy down here what I afterward saw printed; it was written by one of those men who make a business of telling the history of one portion of the world or another, and because you can take it as no more than bare truth, I stand no chance of hearing it said I colored matters too highly simply to give more glory to the Minute Boys of South Carolina than they deserved.

It is necessary I first explain, however, what we came to learn on arriving near where the Tories were encamped. There it was we learned that the enemy were on the south side of the creek, and in order to come at them we must cross a wooden bridge upon which, however cautiously we might ride, the sound of our horses' hoofs would ring out sharply enough to give the alarm. It was thus that the Tories were made aware of our coming, for no sooner had the foremost of our men ridden across the planks than the alarm was sounded from the encampment. Now shall the story be told in words of another:

"After the alarm-gun sounded, promptness and swift riding were as necessary as had been caution, and the general ordered his men to follow him at a gallop until the force reached the main road, about three hundred yards from where it was known the enemy lay.

"Here, with the exception of a small number who were to act as cavalry, the entire command dismounted. A body of picked men was ordered down the road to attack the house where a goodly portion of the Tories had been posted. Two companies of footmen under Captain Horry were sent to the right, the cavalry being ordered to the left to support the attack, and General Marion himself bringing up the rear.

"It so happened, however, that the Tories had left the house immediately after being alarmed, and were strongly drawn up in a field near at hand. Here it was they encountered Horry's command on

the advance, with a fire equally severe and unexpected. The effect was that of a surprise upon the Colonists, and Horry's troops fell back in confusion, but were promptly rallied and brought on the charge.

"Immediately the battle became obstinate and bloody, but the appearance of the men who had been ordered to attack the house, and who came up suddenly in the rear of the Tories, soon brought it to a close. Finding themselves between two fires, the enemy gave way in all directions to flee for refuge toward the neighboring swamp."

The same historian states that we lost near about twenty men, when as a matter of fact, I know beyond a peradventure we had but one killed and two wounded.

Another mistake which the same historian makes, is that we took twenty-three prisoners, whereas I saw one hundred and two ranged in line when the last of the fugitives had disappeared in the swamp.

The Minute Boys saw but little of this engagement, owing to the fact that they were counted as among the cavalry, and the mounted men had little of fighting to do, not being ordered into action until mayhap four or five minutes before the victory was complete.

It was another feather in the cap of General Marion, and yet further reason why Tarleton and Wemyss should come once more upon our trail, but of this fact we gave little heed just then, for having been hunted so long, it was no new sensation.

We understood, however, that this last victory

would win for us yet more recruits, and was of greatest aid to us in the work of driving the invader from the Carolinas.

It is not needed I say we took possession of the Tory encampment that night. Immediately after our work had been so thoroughly done, it was as if every man who had taken part in the long march from the Black Mingo suddenly became conscious of the fatigue which was his, and which had been banished only by the excitement of the engagement. Those recruits whom we found awaiting us on the bank of Lynch's Creek stood guard against a possible attack, and we weary ones, after giving our faithful steeds a goodly store of provender belonging to the Tories, lay down wherever we chanced to be, there to sleep without interruption until the sun marked the hour of noon.

The first duty which we Minute Boys attended to after being aroused from a most refreshing slumber was the care of our horses. The poor animals had not been groomed since we left the Black Mingo, and more than one of them was severely galled from having worn a saddle so long. Therefore it was we had little opportunity for conversation until the day was well-nigh at an end, and word whispered about camp that shortly after sunset we were to make another change of quarters lest the enemy come upon us unawares. More than one of our fellows grumbled because, after striking a blow, we were forced to run away like frightened sheep, and to these Gabriel made answer much like this:

"Before our work has been finished we shall march and countermarch many a weary mile, for I question if there be true men enough living in the Carolinas to make up such an army as would be needed to stand long against the force which the Britishers will send. Because Tarleton and Wemyss have seemingly tired of chasing us, is no proof that they will not soon be in hot pursuit. While we were at the Black Mingo they may have believed it was General Marion's desire to run away, but now they know to their cost that we are somewhat alive."

"What about the prisoners we have taken?" Jared Breen asked, as if fearing it might become his duty to aid in guarding them, and one of the troopers near by replied:

"They have been sent away, lad. You need have no fear that our commander will hamper himself with such as they."

"Sent away?" I cried with something very near akin to horror, for at the instant I fancied he might be telling us they had been sent out of the world in the same manner the Britishers had disposed of score upon score of our people.

"The 'Swamp Fox' does not fight that way," the trooper replied. "Even though the Britishers declare we are not soldiers, but only a 'ragged regiment' of planters who hardly know how to load a musket, we guard our honor as men, and refrain from murdering prisoners. I can't say where the Tories have been sent, but certain it is from this time out we shall hold all that can be

captured and cared for, instead of letting them go free to have another blow at us."

It was a relief to know we were not to be hampered with prisoners, and, as a matter of fact, if we had considered the situation for a moment we would have understood full well that with such tactics as the general was employing, it would be impossible to carry on our swift marches any such useless and even dangerous lumber.

I was more concerned in learning who might be the traitor among us, and what had become of Seth Hastings, therefore said as much to Gabriel, who replied in a tone of irritation:

"I am counting that it will be many a long day before the first question can be answered, and as to the second, we need not give overly much care until such time as we are able to lay hands upon him once more, for now this last attack has been made it is of little moment that he tells the enemy where we were three days ago."

"But it is in my mind that we Minute Boys should give whatsoever attention we may toward finding him, for until the scoundrel has answered in some way for the injury he would have done us, I shall not believe we have performed our duty."

"I am more than willing to join in any attempt which it is possible to make, William Rufus," the lad said laughingly, "but it is my opinion that we have our work cut out for us yet this many a day, and hunting a traitorous cur will not be a portion of it."

"What do you mean?" I asked in surprise

thinking perhaps he had information from his brother as to our possible movements.

"Nothing more than you yourself can see plainly," he replied. "The Tories whom we have driven into the swamp will soon make it known that the 'ragged regiment' has increased in size until able to give fair battle to an army of five hundred, and such news having been carried to the British camp, what think you will be the result?"

"They will come hotfoot after us, as a matter of course," I replied, and it was as if the words had no more than been uttered when two of our people came riding into the encampment at full speed, their horses white with foam, and the riders urging them on until having come directly in front of our commander.

We who saw this had no need to ask questions. The evidences of hard riding told quite as plainly as words could, that the enemy was near at hand, and in such numbers that flight was necessary.

While they were yet talking with the general I began saddling my horse, and the remainder of our company of Minute Boys followed my example, all of us believing that within a few moments at the most would the command be given to break camp.

We lads went even so far as to mount, with our few belongings strapped to the saddles, and then came that word which caused me greatest astonishment.

"Picket the horses in the building," Captain Horry shouted, "and see to it that they are tethered securely."

I dismounted like one in a daze, saying to Gabriel:

"Can it be possible that we are to fight a pitched battle?"

"Surely it has that appearance, lad, and I am not to be considered a braggart when I say to you that it gives me much pleasure, even though the odds may be so strongly against us. We have turned tail after every successful attack, as if it was possible only for us to fight when we could surprise the foe, and it seems to me that a good drubbing, if we were not wiped entirely out of existence, would be better than beating so many retreats."

The dear lad showed real enthusiasm at this prospect of making a stand against the enemy, and while I am by no means willing to own myself a coward, I must in truth confess that the prospect was far from pleasing to me.

The cold chill of fear ran up and down my spine, and I asked myself whether at the time when courage was most needed I might not show the white feather.

It was the fear of showing that I was afraid, rather than of meeting the enemy, which caused me discomfort of mind.

CHAPTER XIV

A QUEER MESSAGE

It was fortunate for me that, not being in any way connected with the command of the Minute Boys, there was nothing for me to do in the way of making ready to receive the enemy, otherwise I might have given evidence of the timorousness which was in my heart. To have seen Gabriel at that moment one would have said he had been born a soldier, for after drawing us up in line just behind a small shed, he moved here and there swiftly, taking heed to every fellow's equipment, and assuring himself that all were in proper trim for the work before them.

My courage came back ever so little when the dear lad thus showed himself eager for a brush with the enemy, and I saw that all my comrades were in good spirits because at last were we to show our faces to the foe in regular battle. Then came to my mind the unpleasant question as to how many redcoats might be advancing upon us, and I said to myself that if I could know exactly what information the scouts had brought, then would it be possible to assume a braver air; but this standing in line, uncertain whether one hundred or one thousand were advancing against us, was by no means pleasant.

However, and perhaps fortunately for me, we were not kept long in suspense. Before the remainder of General Marion's following were well prepared for that which was to come, the thunder of horses' hoofs could be heard near at hand, and by the noise I judged that a large force — perhaps an entire battalion — was approaching within range.

As we afterward learned, this was a portion of Wemyss's command, which had been scouring the country to the northward, and were thus come upon us through being on their way to rejoin the commander at Georgetown.

It was as if we no sooner heard the hoof-beats than the entire line of red came out from amid the foliage, the men riding four abreast, and deploying into line immediately after leaving the shelter of the trees.

At the right and at the left of us Minute Boys were our people drawn up under such cover as could be had, and therefore it was that we lads stood in the centre of the line where most like the hardest part of the fighting would come.

On understanding this, Gabriel said in a low, sharp tone as he walked to and fro in front of us, evidently striving to repress his excitement:

"Now is the time, lads, when we may show whether we are worthy to be called soldiers. It is for us to do a little more than our duty, because as yet we are untried. Therefore let each look well to himself, for when this action is come to an end we shall be counted as able to stand shoulder to

shoulder with our elders, or be pronounced striplings not worthy to bear arms in the Cause."

I know not whether these words gave more heart to my comrades, but certain it is that at the time I hardly knew what he said, so intent was I in gazing upon that crimson stream which continued to pour out from among the green leaves as if it would never come to an end. While I was wondering how many of us would fall at the first volley, the word to open fire was passed along the line, and in a twinkling the smoke enveloped us like a cloud from amid which could be seen tiny jets of flame as those men, more slow to obey the command than their comrades, discharged here and there a musket.

In less than thirty seconds it was impossible for us to take aim because we could no longer see the enemy, and then came that intoxication which I have ever felt when assailed by fumes of gunpowder.

It was afterward told me that we did not stand there in line more than five minutes, but I could have sworn that at least half an hour passed from the time the command to fire was given, until the troopers who were on the left of us rushed forward from the shelter of the building like a swarm of angry hornets, the word being passed along the line for us to cease firing lest we shoot our own friends.

More than one of our company of Minute Boys would have broken line in order to follow those who were charging upon the enemy, but Gabriel held them in place by saying:

"Stand firmly, lads; it is your duty to await the word of command. We were ordered to take position here, and here we shall remain until different commands are given."

It surprised me to find all of our little company yet unhurt. I heard the whistle of bullets above my head, and could see here and there upon the shed behind us white spots which told where the missiles had splintered the wood, therefore had felt certain our loss must have been considerable.

"The Britishers don't know how to take aim," Archie Gordon cried in a tone of triumph as he gazed to the right and to the left without seeing any person who appeared to be wounded. "Look yonder, and you will learn the difference between our way of fighting and theirs!" He pointed to where our people were already overrunning the enemy's line, and here and there red blotches on the ground told where the redcoats lay dead or wounded.

We saw among them so many that it seemed as if we must have brought down a full quarter of their number, and again went up a ringing cheer of triumph, for already half of the general's force was driving the enemy before them, and that enemy supposed to be well-disciplined, seasoned soldiers who had fought on many a field.

Again had General Marion's "ragged regiment" whipped the redcoats in so short a time as would seem, to one not on the field, almost incredible.

Were it not that those men who make a trade of writing history have described each of these engagements of ours, giving us of South Carolina

even more credit than I have dared to set down here, I should fear that he who may read these lines at some time in the future, might accuse me of trying to draw the long bow. In all these encounters we had met British soldiers who were thoroughly well-trained in the art of warfare — if indeed the killing of people be an art — and yet had driven them before us when more than once they numbered ten times our strength. Therefore am I prompted to give my explanation of how this was brought about:

Let it be understood that I do not set myself up as an authority in such matters, being as yet called a boy, for in years I have not arrived at man's estate, but one who has taken part in this struggle for liberty may be allowed an opinion as to why the "ragged regiment" were able to thus best the enemy. Both Tarleton and Wemyss, when pursuing General Marion, had enlisted as many Tories as could be persuaded to join them; these same renegades, being even greener at the work than we, and not animated by a love of country and home, as were our people, were the first to turn tail when the bullets came thickly. It is said by those who know, that there is nothing so contagious as the panic of fear, and I am allowing that these Tories spread that contagion in every engagement we fought.

Then again, and it really begins to seem as if I were making some apology for the British, the king's troops were accustomed to fight only in line of battle. Therefore when we sought cover, follow-

ing the example of the Indians, they, not accustomed to standing before an unseen enemy, grew cowardly at being shot down when no person was in sight.

Perhaps it was needless for me to set down all these words, but as I think of the many times we met the foe and vanquished him, when by all the rules of war our people should have been wiped out entirely, I have the fear that whosoever reads what I have written will set me down as a braggart, even though proof of my statement may be had by referring to what wise men have said concerning the matter.

When those of our people who stood on the left of the Minute Boys' line had disappeared in pursuit of the fleeing foe, there were left in the encampment a hundred or more men in addition to our company. One of these, who claimed to have the rank of captain, but I know not with what right, took command, ordering us lads to march around to the other side of the building in order that we might act as sentinels against a possible attack from the southward.

It was not for us to question any one's authority at such a time, for we knew full well that some such service was needed, but it went sadly against the grain, for even I had become eager to fight now that the first flush of fear had passed away.

During the hour which followed each of us paced to and fro on such beats as had been assigned by Gabriel, hearing nothing, seeing nothing to betoken a struggle between the enemy, although we knew

full well that somewhere in the distance, and not very far away, our people were striving to kill, or struggling to prevent others from killing them.

Then, squad by squad, those who had gone in pursuit returned looking victorious, but the most ominous thing to me, in this victory, was the fact that they brought with them no prisoners.

When General Marion and Captain Horry, who were among the last in returning, as they had been the first in pursuing the redcoats, came up, they called about them a dozen or more of the men, and while we lads, in obedience to orders, brought out the horses from where they had been picketed in the dwelling, this little group held a council of war.

At the end of another hour orders were given for us to mount, and we rode slowly away, covering, mayhap, a distance of six miles, when we found ourselves at the plantation of Henry Davis.

Here word was given to make camp once more, and at the same time it was intimated that we would not be allowed to remain idle save until the following morning.

We Minute Boys, after having cared for the horses, threw ourselves down on the ground in a group, as was our custom, each fellow looking gloomy and disappointed. No one seemed disposed to start a conversation, and all remained silent while around us the men were making merry over this last victory, which was counted to be greater than any other, because we had met the redcoats in fair fight when they, not we, were the attacking party.

It was while we were lying there in apparent despondency that an elderly man, by the name of Paul Sawyer, who could ride a horse with firmer seat, and fire a musket with truer aim than many of the younger men, came up, looking at us for a moment in surprise, after which he said with a laugh, as if he saw in us something comical:

"Is this a party of mutes getting ready for a funeral?"

No one made reply, and after surveying us again for what seemed to me a long while, he asked cheerily:

"Why are you lads so down in the dumps? Is it possible that the escape of Seth Hastings, disquieting though it may be, can cover your faces with gloom when you should be joining yonder men who have given themselves over to rejoicing?"

"Those who are making merry have a right to do so, for they have done good work this day," Gabriel replied moodily. "We are ready to give them all praise, but at the same time it is not in the hearts of lads, or men for that matter, to be cheery under disappointment like ours, for we may ride many a day without having another such opportunity."

"What mean you, lad?" Master Sawyer asked in perplexity. "What opportunity have the others had that you did not share?"

"That of showing what we might do in such an engagement as has just passed," Gabriel replied. "After it was known we were to stand for the first time face to face with the redcoats, we believed

the moment had come when we might show to our elders that we were worthy to march with them."

"Well, have you not shown it, lad?"

"How could we, sir? Our place in line was where we had every reason to expect hot work, and yet the men on our left bore all the brunt. We simply remained there, not being allowed to take part in the chase, and at a time when we might have struck a blow, were set to doing sentry duty."

"So you think the Minute Boys have not had a chance to prove whether it be in them to make soldiers, eh?" Master Sawyer said with a quizzical expression on his face, and having thus spoken, he wheeled sharply around, walking straight toward Master Davis's dwelling.

Archie Gordon said, as the old man strode away with a bearing of strength and agility that a younger might have envied:

"If I could ride as he does, and keep from my face all show of fear as he is able to do, then would I force the members of this 'ragged regiment' to call me comrade!"

"We must earn that right!" Jared Green cried quickly, "and we will do so, else am I much mistaken, for, unfortunately, yet many a weary day must pass before we can say that the invaders have been driven from the soil of the Carolinas."

Then we fell to talking of what it might yet be possible for us Minute Boys to do, growing more cheerful each moment, until General Marion and Captain Horry came up, halting directly in front of us.

"It is no more than right that I should praise you for what has been done this day," the commander said abruptly. "You showed the best of soldierly qualities by remaining at the post assigned, instead of joining in the chase, which I know must have been a great temptation to disobedience, and, in addition, gave good proof that we can count on you as upon any others in the force. More than once during the little action did I observe you carefully, and it made my heart warm to see you stand up before that fire like well-seasoned soldiers."

"We are not deserving such praise, sir," I ventured to interrupt, "and I much fear you have been led to speak these kindly words by Master Sawyer, who was pleased to make sport of us because we were looking mournful at having lost an opportunity to prove ourselves."

"In much of that you are right, lad. It *was* Master Sawyer called my attention to the fact that the Minute Boys were bewailing what they were pleased to call their ill-fortune, but before he spoke Captain Horry and myself had commented in warm terms upon your bearing under fire, and it was my purpose to repeat later what I have just said. Therefore Master Sawyer had no other hand in it than to hasten the time. Nor are we two alone in believing that you behaved yourselves in goodly fashion, for I have heard more than one of the troopers give you full meed of praise. Keep on as you have begun, and I shall feel proud of having such lads under my command."

With these words the general turned away, leaving us staring at each other like stupids, hardly knowing whether to laugh or frown. We could not disbelieve him, yet it seemed impossible we had fairly won any such commendation.

"It seems as if we have very little idea of what the Minute Boys have done," Archie said laughingly. "Who shall say but that one day we will find ourselves famous throughout all the Colonies without having been aware of doing anything out of the ordinary."

Gabriel's face was actually radiant with joy because of what his brother had said, and I fancied he was on the point of giving words to that which was in his mind, when a young girl, perhaps no more than fourteen years old, appeared suddenly from around the corner of the dwelling, coming directly toward where we lay.

It was not so rare to see girls or women about a plantation as to have excited any comment from us, but there was that in her bearing which spoke of something important. Without being able to explain why, every lad of our company believed she was seeking the Minute Boys.

Nor in this were we mistaken, for, advancing swiftly until standing within a few paces of our leader, she asked:

"Is there one among you lads by the name of Gabriel Marion?"

"Ay, and that is me," Gabriel replied, taking off his hat with a bow such as the gouty king could not have equalled.

"'ARE YOU MASTER DAVIS'S DAUGHTER?'"

"Then I am to say that if you would lay hands upon the lad who escaped you at Black Mingo Swamp you shall go this night, as soon as may be, four miles up the road, where is the dwelling and forge of Reuben Rowe."

"How know you all that?" Gabriel asked, and now he spoke sharply, forgetting his courtly flourishes.

"Word was brought by one of Master Rowe's negroes to my mother, and she sent me here with the message."

"Are you Master Davis's daughter?" Gabriel asked, still speaking severely, and then, remembering that he was talking to a girl, added in a tone of apology as she replied in the affirmative:

"You must remember that it is a strange message you bring, and at such times as these one in the Carolinas fears lest a trap may be set for him."

"Surely you cannot believe that my mother or I would set a trap for lads who, so it is said, have fought as well as men this day," the girl said, and like the silly that I was, I flushed with pleasure because of her praise.

"Not so, nor would I mistrust any of Master Davis's family, but it seems strange, without questioning the part you or your mother are playing, that word should be sent us regarding a traitor, when, with no more labor, if peradventure Seth Hastings is prisoner, he might be brought here to the plantation."

"To that I can make no answer," she replied

with a smile. "The negro returned at once, having delivered the message to my mother."

Gabriel was silent for a moment, and then he asked, with less of severity in his tone:

"Tell me who is this Master Rowe?"

"The smith who lives four miles up the road, as I have said."

"But I mean, how is he disposed toward us who oppose the king?"

"I have heard it said that he declares this fight is none of his making. He is ready to work at his forge for one side or the other, having no concern in what he calls 'the quarrel.' My father neither trusts nor mistrusts him, and more than that I cannot tell you."

Then Gabriel thanked her for having brought the message, and she, after making one courtesy which seemed to include all us lads, went back to the house as rapidly as she had come.

It can readily be imagined that our tongues were unloosened immediately she was gone, for verily it was an odd message that had been brought. We argued the matter over and over without arriving at any conclusion, but keeping all the while before us certain questions which we would have answered before setting out on what might be a most disastrous journey.

Who had sent the messenger? Was it the smith? If so, how did he reconcile the assertion that he had no concern with one side or the other? Then again, if his leaning was toward us who were fighting against the king, how did he come to know that

Seth Hastings was a traitor, or that we Minute Boys were most eager to lay hands upon him?

With all our tongue-wagging we could find no answer to these questions, and we sat there perplexed, feeling that perhaps we might get our hands upon the young scoundrel if we obeyed the summons, and yet halting lest we prove ourselves simples by falling into what looked to be a trap.

I question if we could have settled the matter ourselves even though discussing it four and twenty hours, but when we were most sorely perplexed, wavering as to whether we should go or stay, a happy thought came to Gabriel, and he gave it words by saying:

"I am not of the mind to believe, without better proof, that any one in this Tory-ridden section of the Carolinas would try to do us such a favor, even though he knew Seth Hastings and what he had done. Now, because by remaining here idle we may lose an opportunity so greatly desired, or by going fall into a trap, I propose that we lay the matter before Master Paul Sawyer, who should be a good judge, and follow his decision."

To this we were already agreed without argument, not only because we had faith in Master Sawyer, but in order that one of our elders might settle the question, thereby taking from us some of the blame in case we ventured into a hole from which we could not retreat.

To the end that no talk might be made which was not heard by all the company, Gabriel proposed that Jared Green should go in search of Master

Sawyer, asking him to join us for a moment, and without explaining the reason.

This was done. In less than five minutes the gentleman stood before us, still wearing the same quizzical expression as when he railed at us for being like mutes at a funeral.

Without using more words than was necessary, Gabriel explained what we would have him judge upon, simply saying that Master Davis's daughter had brought us the message, and repeating what she had told concerning this smith near whose forge we were to find, perhaps, the lad we sought.

Master Sawyer turned it over and over in his mind until I began to think he would never make reply, so impatient was I lest we should, by remaining idle many moments longer, lose the chance of paying off that score to which Seth Hastings was adding every hour.

"It is an odd business, lads, look at it as you may," Master Sawyer said finally, and much to my relief. "It has in it the look of a trap, and at the same time there are chances that some one well disposed toward the Cause, knowing how much mischief that young viper would have wrought, may be trying to do a good turn."

"But I question if there be any hereabout who know what Seth has done."

"And well you may, but at the same time is it impossible?" Master Sawyer asked thoughtfully. "Whether it be a trap or fair dealing, there is chance in it for adventure such as one would grieve to miss. You Minute Boys are seventeen strong,

if I have heard aright — seventeen who have proven yourselves men — and with a smaller squad than that I dare venture to say Francis Marion would set himself against two score redcoats. Now, as the matter appears to me, there is no chance that number of Britishers can be in the vicinity, therefore whence comes the danger of answering the summons, if so be you keep your eyes opened and your wits sharpened?"

"Meaning that you would advise us to go, sir?" Gabriel said, and the old man replied, his eyes twinkling as if in anticipation of a brush with the enemy:

"If so be you are minded to hold your own against twice the number of your force, then go, and I beg of you take one recruit who asks for nothing better than an opportunity to learn who we have hereabouts that would do us such a favor — for a favor to you lads is one to all this company."

"And you would go with us?" Archie cried incredulously.

"Ay, lad, and thank you for the privilege, obeying all the commands of your leader even as you should obey them."

"There is nothing more, then, to be said," and Gabriel sprang toward where the horses were tethered as if he would make ready for the journey at once, but Master Sawyer stopped him by saying gravely:

"Do not forget, lad, that you have first to gain

permission. He who is a soldier must not adventure on his own business at will."

"I will speak with the general at once," Gabriel said as he ran swiftly away, and Jared Green asked anxiously of Master Sawyer:

"Think you there will be any question as to our going, sir?"

"Not if I know Francis Marion as well as I have believed. He will consent readily, and at the same time grieve that, because of his position, he may not form one of the party."

That Master Sawyer was not mistaken in at least a portion of his statement, we understood when Gabriel returned in all haste as if eager to set off, and while he was saddling his horse I asked:

"What did the general say?"

"That we had his consent since Master Sawyer was so kind as to go with us. He wanted it understood that he did not question our ability to take care of ourselves, but was doubtful as to our judgment if we found ourselves in close quarters. At first he would have it that we take a squad of troopers, but I insisted this was the business of none save the Minute Boys, and we would be ashamed to have it said in camp that we dare not go out in search of one who had done us wrong, save with an escort."

"Well spoken, lad," Master Sawyer cried. "Now while your command is making ready I will look after my horse, and we will meet in front of the house yonder that all may know our purpose. If so be there is a traitor on this plantation, then

shall he have good opportunity to send word ahead to prepare the ambush."

This was spoken as if in jest, and yet I fancied there was more of seriousness in the words than he would have us believe, for I was convinced that such a man as Master Sawyer, who had proven his mettle time and again, would not be like to set out with a party of lads unless he believed there might be hot work ahead.

Seeing us saddling, those of the troopers lounging near by asked the reason, and when we told them, making no concealment of what had been heard, more than one shook his head sagely, as if to say that it would be useless to expect other than folly from a party of boys. All showed by their bearing that they had little faith Seth Hastings was awaiting us, unless peradventure he might be at the rendezvous with sufficient of redcoats to prove our undoing.

Now we were committed to the adventure there was no show of fear in our faces, however timorous we may have been at heart, for it would have been a hundred times worse to admit that our courage failed at the very outset, than to fall into the cruellest trap ever laid.

Master Sawyer did not delay us. We found him in the saddle at the door of the dwelling, and on the veranda sat General Marion and Captain Horry, the commander saying as we rode up:

"It is no sign of cowardice to reconnoitre well before you go into a place from which retreat may be impossible. Make certain of the ground before

advancing, even though such precaution causes you to ride slowly, and remember that there are occasions when one may be brave and at the same time flee from an overwhelming force. Do not take too many chances, and if it so be this is a trap set for your harm, punish severely those who baited it. In case the entire company cannot report at midnight, send, if possible, a messenger to acquaint me of your safety, otherwise I shall order a squad out for your relief."

Then the general saluted, we returned it, and then giving spurs to our horses, rode swiftly down the lane leading to the road.

CHAPTER XV

ROWE'S SMITHY

WHEN we were come to the highway Master Sawyer reined in his horse that he might ride in the rear of the company, whereupon Gabriel, who was in the lead, called to him:

"Why should you not ride with me, Master Sawyer, instead of tailing on alone?"

"Because I am not going out as a member of your company, but simply as one who has a fancy for a bit of adventure."

I could understand, and so evidently did Gabriel, that he would not take position in the line where it might seem as if he was sharing in the leadership, or was eager to give advice, but we knew right well that if we came to close quarters with an enemy, he would be in the front without waiting for an invitation.

Gabriel insisted that it was a guest's right to ride with the leader, and Master Sawyer laughingly spurred his horse forward, saying as he came up:

"When I am with lads who in the midst of victory can mourn because they had no better opportunity to display their courage than by standing fast in line as soldiers should, then am I careful not to do that which might detract in any way from whatsoever of success may come to them."

"But we are looking upon you in the light of an adviser," I cried, and it must be remembered that among us Minute Boys there was little of that military discipline and strait-lacedness which the king's officers thought necessary to maintain.

"There is a question in my mind, lad, whether my advice would be any better than Master Marion's judgment, for I have both heard and seen him prove himself well able to command even a much larger company."

Then it was that Gabriel asked, speaking purposely loud so all in the line might hear him:

"Is it in your mind, Master Sawyer, that we should ride boldly up the road until arriving at Rowe's smithy, or had we better reconnoitre, as the general seemed to suggest?"

"First let me hear your opinion?" the gentleman said, as if speaking to one whom he considered an equal.

"It appears to me," Gabriel replied after a brief hesitation, "that we would be in no more danger, if peradventure danger menaces, by riding boldly on. In case that message be the bait of a trap, then would those who are evilly disposed toward us be on their guard against whatsoever reconnoitring we might do."

"Yours is much my way of thinking, lad; but I would say that while we go as if there was no suspicion in our minds, we be constantly prepared for a surprise, and then if anything serious should come up, the company would not be taken at any great disadvantage."

There was little need for a suggestion like this. I dare venture to say every member of the party felt much as I did, that at any moment we might be confronted by a superior force, and instead of swinging our muskets across our shoulders, as was the usual method while on the march, we carried the weapons resting on one arm, thus having but a single hand for the bridle-rein.

We rode at a moderate pace such as should have brought us to the smithy in forty minutes or more, and I am minded to sound the praises of my comrades by saying confidently, that if a stranger had seen us then he would have had no grounds for believing we were expecting an attack. Although not for any ordinary amount of wealth would I have allowed myself to be left behind, it surely seemed as if we had no warrant for taking the risks — as if the capture of Seth Hastings was hardly so important that we should endanger our liberty, if not our lives, by trying to make him prisoner again.

However, we were on the road to the smithy; the question had been settled without my having raised a voice in protest, yet I felt as fully committed to it as if to me alone had been left the decision.

Once during the short journey we halted that the horses might drink from a brook which crossed the road, and then on again until we were come to a forge, so small that when the smith would shoe a horse the animal must perforce remain outside the building. Nearby, perhaps fifty yards away, was

a dwelling built of logs, with a long shed behind it evidently intended as a stable for horses and cattle.

No person was to be seen; the door of the smithy, a rude affair made of splints and hanging by one hinge, was nearly closed, and this in itself, to us who were suspicious, seemed strange, for the day was warm, and a man working at the forge would have been in need of all the fresh air he could get. Some one near me said, in a tone half of doubt, half of anger:

"The place is abandoned! How could Master Rowe have sent a messenger?"

Just then we heard the clinking sound of metal struck against metal, and Gabriel would have dismounted to open the door had not Master Sawyer clutched him by the arm, as he said quickly:

"Remain in your saddle, lad! It is the safer course, for he who dismounts must turn his back upon the enemy to regain his footing in the stirrups." Then, raising his voice, he cried, "Ho, in the smithy! We would speak with you, good Master Rowe!"

The hail was not answered immediately, and it seemed to me that Master Sawyer was on the point of crying again, when the door was pulled inward a few inches as the heavily bearded face of a man peered out.

Gabriel waited an instant, fancying Master Sawyer was minded to conduct the conversation, but since the gentleman sat silent, our leader asked in an unnecessarily loud voice:

"Is this Master Reuben Rowe?"

"Ay, and what may you be wanting of me? A shoe for a horse?"

"We call ourselves the Minute Boys of South Carolina," Gabriel replied, as if believing this would be the only information needed to announce the purpose of our coming, and the man stared at him as if not understanding.

Gabriel repeated the words, and after waiting while one might have counted ten, the man asked, with a stupidity which I believed was feigned:

"Is that all you have to tell me?"

"You sent one of your negroes to the Davis plantation with a message for the Minute Boys," Gabriel said, and I noted that he shifted his musket ever so slightly so he might be able to raise it to his shoulder on the instant.

"I sent no negro, and for the very good reason that I have none."

"But Mistress Davis's daughter told us it was your man who brought the word."

"Then Mistress Davis's daughter will have to guess again," the smith replied in a mocking tone. "There has been an old negro whom nobody seems to own, living near by here for the past year, and now and then I have hired him to do some bit of work for me."

"Then you did not send him to the Davis plantation to-day?" and now Gabriel spoke sharply, whereupon the man replied in an equally curt tone:

"I have not seen the old rascal for a week or more."

We lads looked at each other in genuine alarm, for now did it seem positive a trap had been set, and the wonder was that those who were eager to do us a mischief did not begin their work.

It was when the silence had lasted a full minute, and none of us seemed inclined to break it, that Master Sawyer took upon himself the task of gathering information, if there was any to be had in that quarter.

"You are Master Reuben Rowe, and owner of this smithy?"

"I am, sir," the man replied, speaking more deferentially now, for mayhap he knew that the man addressing him was not one to be trifled with.

"You say you sent no message, yet one was received which purported to have come from here. Have you seen any person in this vicinity who might have hired the negro to go to the Davis plantation?"

"With the exception of a neighbor who lives two miles farther up the road, and who came here shortly after sunrise to have a hoe mended, I have seen no one."

"Where does this negro, of whom you speak, live? He must have a shack of some kind in which to sleep."

"Ay, that he has, and cultivates a bit of land, raising mayhap as much as will keep him from one year's end to another. His place is three miles or more down on the edge of the swamp."

"In what direction?"

"Yonder path leads to it."

Now the smith came out of the building that he might point to a faint trail running through a grove at right angles to the course we had been pursuing.

Master Sawyer noted the direction, and said, as if thinking aloud:

"Then in order for the negro to go to the Davis plantation, he must come by this forge?"

"Unless he took a short cut through the woods in order to save considerable distance. Certain it is he can leave his shack without coming this way, for I have known three or four weeks to go by without his showing himself, but yet have heard of him at one place or another along the road."

It was evident he would gain no more information from Master Rowe. He plainly showed he had told us all he could, or all he intended to, and if he spoke the truth the riddle was to be read only by our following the trail until we came upon the negro who had acted as messenger. This, as it seemed to me, would be a most unwise thing to do, for it required that we should ride amid the underbrush, where, if an ambush had been laid, we could not well avoid it.

Gabriel made one more attempt at coming upon a solution of the puzzle, by asking:

"Do you know a lad by the name of Seth Hastings?"

Master Rowe shook his head.

"Have you heard that there was a prisoner hereabout to be delivered to those who are defending this State?"

"I have heard nothing whatsoever about prisoners or Tories, nor would I listen if any were inclined to tell the tale. I am a man of peace, and do not count on meddling with the affairs either of the king or the rebels."

The fact that he had used the word "rebels," when speaking of us, caused me to believe the fellow was inclined to be a Tory even though he might not take open part with one side or the other, and straightway was I more suspicious of him than ever.

"He who stands 'twixt two parties, trying to side with neither, is either a fool or a knave," Master Sawyer cried threateningly. "You remain here, counting to be undisturbed because of not taking part in the war, and yet are unwilling to raise a hand for or against the State which gives you living room. Although I have no great love for Tories, they are men as compared with those who strive to take a living from the land without contributing in any way toward the general good."

Master Rowe stepped back a pace, his hands clenched, and I thought of a verity that he was about to make an attack upon our outspoken companion, who shifted ever so slightly in the saddle as if to defend himself against a blow.

The smith evidently thought better of his first intent, if indeed it was what I suspected, and tried in vain to curb his anger as he replied:

"It has ever been given to the people of the Carolinas to believe as they chose, and I choose to believe that he who stands aloof from both sides

at such a time is the better citizen. Nor does it become you, Master Paul Sawyer, whose hand has been in every brawl since this uprising against the king was first begun, to revile a man who strives to live honestly."

Now it was Master Sawyer's turn to be angry, and mine to be surprised, for until this moment I had no idea the smith recognized any member of our company, and because he did so were my suspicions increased.

Master Sawyer remained silent a full half-minute, and then, leaning over in the saddle as if to invite a blow, he said, speaking slowly and distinctly:

"Hark ye, Master Smith, if you know me by name, you are also well aware that I keep my word to the letter howsoever many brawls I may have a hand in, and this I am telling you to the end that it may be guarded against, if you feel so disposed. A messenger was sent to the Davis plantation much the same as in your name, and in another four and twenty hours I shall know whether you have just told us the truth or not. If so be you are trying to deceive us in order that harm may be worked to those who are fighting for the Cause, then as true as I am Paul Sawyer, so true will I take your life as forfeit for treachery!"

Master Rowe quailed before these passionately uttered words, and I fancied that on his cheeks came something very like a spot of red, but whether of fear or of anger I would not attempt to guess. Then, without a word, he turned abruptly and en-

tered the forge, closing the door behind him with no little violence.

"Well, what do you make of it, sir?" Gabriel asked a few seconds after the man had disappeared.

"It is a trap which has been set for you, lad; of that there can be no question. Now you have my answer, and I am asking what you propose to do? Do not speak now; there is no reason why we should hold this conversation where perchance an enemy stands ready to repeat it," Master Sawyer said quickly, as he laid his hand on Gabriel's arm when the latter was about to make reply.

Then he pulled his horse sharply around, riding back over the road we had just come, all of us Minute Boys following his example.

When we were a quarter of a mile or more from the forge Master Sawyer reined in his steed, and our company of Minute Boys came to a halt, taking position in a circle so we might hear all that was said.

"Now I ask for your answer, lad. What are you minded to do?"

"It is for my comrades to have a voice in this matter, sir," Gabriel replied, "and the question shall be left to them. As for my part, I am minded to learn where the trap is, that we may know who set it, believing that when such information has been gained we will stand mighty near Seth Hastings, for there can be no other around here who knows how eager we are to come up with him."

Although I was, as has already been said, opposed to this adventure, it would have shamed me

had Gabriel made other reply, and on the instant I cried:

"I am with you, lad, wherever you choose to go!"

I had not yet spoken these words before all the members of our company were demanding that they have an opportunity of learning what we were eager to know.

"You are lads of spirit," Master Sawyer said heartily. "I would I were young again, if for no other reason than that I might ask to join this force, because now is the time when much adventure may be had, and with such a party, even though it be small, he who craves for a venturesome life will not be mistaken."

"You surely are one of us this afternoon, sir, and much better fitted to say how we may ferret out the plot with the least danger to ourselves."

Before Master Sawyer could make reply, I interrupted, fearing lest we forget the promise which had been much the same as made:

"Remember, Gabriel, that a messenger was to be sent back to the general, if we could not return before midnight, and since this matter may require some considerable time, I propose that he be made acquainted with what little we have already learned."

The dear lad agreed with me promptly, and then came the question of who would act the part of messenger. None of the lads were like to turn their backs willingly at such a time, therefore were several minutes spent in drawing lots, and Jared

Green was the one finally chosen. I pitied him because of the disappointment written on his face, knowing how I should have felt under the same circumstances, but was not generous enough to offer an exchange of places with him.

"You may repeat all that which we have heard, and say it is our intention to learn more regarding this thing before returning; but beg of my brother that he do not send any of the troopers here because of thinking the danger may be too great. This is a matter belonging to the Minute Boys entirely, and we should be allowed to work it out ourselves, with the aid of Master Sawyer."

"You will be working it out entirely alone, lad, for I count myself as one of the company, and under your command," Master Sawyer said quickly, and then Jared, with a glance of both sorrow and envy at our little company, rode away.

"Now that we are ready for business, lad, I have a proposition to make," Master Sawyer said, speaking hurriedly as if believing that time pressed. "The smith may not have told us all the truth today, and I dare venture to say he did not, but still am allowing there was somewhat in his talk which we may believe. He said the old negro could leave his shack in the thicket without coming past the forge. Now if that be the case, then shall we find the trail on this left-hand side of the road. Therefore do I suggest that we ride slowly along, and when we come to anything which looks like a path, follow it, to the end that we may come upon those

who are waiting for us in the rear, thus gaining no slight advantage."

There could have been no objection made to this proposition, for it smacked of sound common sense, although some of our party doubted if Master Rowe had mingled any truth in that tale of his — questioning whether the messenger which went to the Davis plantation had not gone directly from the forge; but Master Sawyer disputed that belief by saying:

"If there had been enemies waiting in the vicinity of the forge, we should have been fired upon when we turned as if to go back to the plantation."

Then we rode along at a foot-pace, watching narrowly the left side of the road, and I confess to considerable surprise when, after having travelled perhaps a mile, we came upon a trail which struck off from the highway at an angle such as would apparently bring us to the negro's hut, if Master Rowe had given correct information regarding it.

"Are we to ride through here, sir, or walk?" Gabriel asked, and Master Sawyer, after a moment's thought replied:

"To my mind we had best remain in the saddle. Were I in command of this company, I would dismount three lads, instructing them to tether their horses at such distance from the road that the animals could not betray their whereabouts in case the enemy passed near at hand. Then have them go on as scouts considerably in advance of the force. If, as I believe will be the case, they come

upon signs of the enemy, the footmen are to fall back to the rear, leaving us who are mounted to begin the fight, for I'm counting that you intend to come to close quarters if redcoat or Tory is found?"

"Ay, that we are, sir," Archie Gordon said eagerly, and he added in a lower tone to Gabriel, "If you love me, lad, do not put me among those who are to dismount, lest I should miss the chance of coming upon the traitorous cur before he be killed!"

Gabriel looked quickly around to see that none save I had heard this request, and then he made what I believed a good selection of the scouts by naming the two Marshall boys and Jacob Breen. We knew by experience what the Marshall boys could do, and were safe in entrusting them with a most important portion of the adventure, for in fact everything depended upon those who went ahead.

We rode into the woods nearly a mile before the scouts dismounted, and then halted that they might be able to gain an advance of perhaps a hundred yards.

When it seemed probable they were that distance ahead of us, we moved forward in single file, Gabriel leading, Master Sawyer and I following, while the others trailed on behind.

The horses made little or no noise as we rode on at a foot-pace, for the mosses and leaves deadened all sound, and if this trail led us to where we believed it would, then those who had counted on

giving us a surprise would find that the tables had been turned.

It was a weird, ghostly march, for by this time the sun was near to setting, and amid the foliage it was as if night had already come. No lad dared to speak lest he might give an alarm to the enemy, and I absolutely found myself at times trying to hold my breath that the thumping of my heart might be stilled, for it beat like a trip-hammer, as it seemed to me. To this nervous expectancy was added the fear that we might be attacked at any instant.

The horses, jaded with much travelling, moved forward with hanging heads at a snail's pace; slowly the minutes went by until the darkness enveloped us, and we were forced to trust to the instinct of the animals for keeping the path. I was near to crying aloud in fear, thus proving myself the veriest coward, when amid the blackness of the night I saw a yet darker figure moving swiftly toward me. My horse's bridle was seized, and I drew a long breath of relief as a familiar voice whispered:

"It is time to halt, for we have found our enemy."

It was one of the Marshall lads, who had come through the foliage almost at right angles with the course we were pursuing, and had failed to reach the leader, therefore I whispered hoarsely to Master Sawyer that the scouts were come in.

"There are ten or fifteen men at the negro's shack, which is less than half a mile to the left — you must have passed the trail which leads to it,"

Joseph Marshall whispered when we had gathered around him as closely as the growth of trees would permit. "They have been questioning among themselves as to whether we will come, for I crept so near as to be able to hear a portion of the conversation."

"What sort of men are they?" Master Sawyer asked. "Soldiers, Tories, or lads?"

"There are three who wear red coats, much torn, and I fancy they were among those who were in such haste to get away from us in the last action. Such of the others as I could see had the look of Tories, and all are supplied with weapons."

"And Seth Hastings?" Archie asked eagerly.

"Ay, he is there, and on such good terms with the three redcoats that I can well believe he was their companion in the flight."

It now seemed a simple thing for us to get possession of that villainous cur. He had most like been with the enemy we last met, and fled with his present companions to this place in the thicket, which it was reasonable to suppose they had come upon by chance. It was easy to guess that the old negro knew of our being at the Davis plantation, and had given the information, whereupon Seth Hastings contrived the plan; a mighty poor one, as he would soon learn.

Not until the other two scouts had come in and brought up their horses did we venture to make any move other than raise the question as to whether we had best not leave the animals where

they were; but to this Master Sawyer dissented, giving as his reason:

"I have always found that the more quickly you can come upon your enemy, and the better equipped you are for chasing him, the more chances there are of making a capture. Therefore if the trail be broad enough, let us ride."

I shall always regret our having followed Master Sawyer's advice on that occasion, for had we dismounted and crept up as would have been possible, then was Seth Hastings made prisoner beyond a peradventure, and thus one precious life would have been saved to the Carolinas and to the Minute Boys.

No good can come of harking back into the past; when once the thing has been done the matter should be ended, and yet I never think of this night without being assailed by a great grief because we were such simples as to hold to the horses while making an attack upon an unmounted foe.

It was decided that we would ride as near the negro's shack as the scouts might deem safe, and then pass to the right and the left in order that the place might be surrounded before the game began. Then we started.

In less than ten minutes we were come to the point where it was possible to see the faint glimmer of a flame through the foliage, and Gabriel and Master Sawyer halted while the remainder of us rode to the right and the left in order to encircle the shack. This we might have done without giving an alarm, but for the mishap which befell Henry Moulton.

I was the leader of that wing which went toward the right, and Henry rode close behind me. We had gone hardly more than thirty paces from the trail when his horse must have stepped into a hole, for he fell forward with a loud snort of pain, making such a noise among the bushes as could have been heard full two hundred yards away.

On the instant came words spoken sharply and quickly, telling that the Tories were on the alert, and then Gabriel's voice crying:

"Ride them down, lads, ride them down! There is no time to be lost!"

We were still floundering among the bushes, striving to the best of our ability, but none might see where his horse was going or what obstacle stood in the way. While I was trying to push ahead through a clump of thorn-bushes till the sharp needles pierced my flesh, the crack of muskets was heard, and perhaps a dozen shots were fired before I succeeded in getting around the impediment in my path.

Then all was silent, save for the crashing here and there which told that a rider was trying to advance, and when I came up to the fire which had been built directly in front of the shack, no person was to be seen..

We had bungled the job as beautifully as any of the redcoats could have done, and to this day a flush of shame comes to my cheek as I remember that we who should have been — really were — versed in woodcraft, blundered ahead on horses amid the thick underbrush and in the darkness, ex-

pecting to catch an enemy who was awaiting our arrival.

Now it was that we had placed ourselves in a position of gravest danger, for there we set our horses in the full glare of the fire, looking at each other like simples, while all those whom Joseph Marshall had seen were hiding, mayhap, in the thicket just beyond, where they could shoot us down without risk of receiving a shot in return.

CHAPTER XVI

A SKIRMISH IN THE DARK

As the full realization of the danger burst upon us, my first thought was that we should ride at full speed until having gained the highway, and almost at the same instant I came to understand that in the darkness, on that narrow trail, we could not hope to make very much speed save at great risk of coming to grief.

I believe of a verity, had I been in command of the Minute Boys I should have lost my head entirely, so critical did the situation appear, and even at this late day I am convinced that the peril was not overestimated. During a full minute we stood there motionless and silent, my comrades most like turning over in their minds, as did I, the folly which had marked our approach. The king's soldiers themselves could not have made a poorer feint at the job than had we.

I fancied Gabriel was nearly as disturbed in mind as myself, for he gave no word of command until Master Sawyer said to him in a low tone:

"By remaining here we are simply offering ourselves as targets to those who are hidden in the thicket, and if I mistake not —"

He did not finish the sentence, for at that instant the report of a musket rang out wondrously sharp

on the still air, and the whistle of the missile as it passed above our heads sounded to me almost as loud as the singing of a bird.

After that first signal that the enemy were not minded to run away, leaving us in undisputed possession of the field, there was no need for a command; with one accord we lads spurred our horses forward until we were partially sheltered by the shack, and even while we were thus moving to a more favorable position came the report of half a dozen weapons. One of the bullets thus sent at random struck the flank of my horse, causing him to plunge and prance until I was like to have spread disorder throughout the entire line.

It was Master Sawyer who first bethought himself to make reply to this salute of lead, and when he discharged his musket in the direction from which we had seen a tiny jet of fire, nearly all our lads followed the example; thus it became a question of reloading while mounted, which is no small task, as any one will learn who attempts a similar feat.

It seemed to me as if our fellows had fired at least twenty shots, the enemy meanwhile replying vigorously, when I heard Gabriel say, as if he was suddenly awakened to the full sense of the situation:

"This shooting at random in the dark can have no effect, and we are only wasting our ammunition. What do you say, Master Sawyer, if we ride up the trail in order to get out of this trap?"

"It is a trap, and no mistake," the gentleman

replied, as if thinking aloud; "but for my advice you lads would have done the work properly, and by this time most like be holding all those renegades prisoners!"

"Why do you say that?" Gabriel asked quickly.

"Because I am beginning to understand that I am in my dotage, otherwise such a proposition as that we advance through the thicket on horseback never would have been made by me."

"There is no reason, sir, why you should blame yourself for what was done with the best intention. We have no time to spend on regrets just now, as it seems to me," Gabriel said softly, and Master Sawyer added, in a tone of contrition:

"Right you are, lad, and I am but giving further proof of my folly, therefore it is best I hold my peace lest I lead you into yet other difficulties."

"But as to whether we shall advance, or make a stand here?" Gabriel insisted.

"As it looks to me, by riding up the trail when we can proceed no faster than a walk, we are giving them good opportunity to pick us off at their leisure, but I would much prefer that you give the command as your judgment dictates."

I could well understand that Master Sawyer had no desire to make suggestions after such a blunder as had been made, and at the same time I realized that what he had said was true. We had entered the trap with our eyes open, knowing full well it had been set for us, and now, from my point of view, we were forced to remain in it during a certain time at least. Gabriel had the same idea as

myself, for on the instant he said in a low tone, himself setting the example:

"We had best dismount, tie the horses' heads together so that they may not be able to stray, and station ourselves between them and the shack here. It is a case of waiting until daybreak."

From the alacrity displayed by our lads as they obeyed this command, I could see that all were in full accord with the decision, and as soon as might be we were making a stand with the horses as a barricade against any who might creep around to the left, while the old negro's hut afforded a poor shelter between us and those who yet remained on our right."

"We started out counting to cover ourselves with glory," Archie Gordon whispered in my ear, "and have speedily proven ourselves to be fools. From this time on we Minute Boys had best remain under the command of the general, not attempting any adventure on our own account."

I was much of the same opinion, but not inclined at that time to grieve over the details of our folly, for we were in too great danger to spend our time talking of what might have been. It was to be a skirmish in the dark, and while I had little fear that the Tories could work us much harm, firing at random as would be necessary, yet no fellow can look cheerful when there is fair prospect of being wiped out by a stray shot.

Once we had made our stand as has been described, and come to realize fully that there was no way out of the trap until day should break, we

set about trying to inflict some injury upon those who had thus far bested us.

Each member of the company took position where he could find shelter, and with musket at his shoulder watched for the flash of light which should tell the whereabouts of him who fired the last shot.

In this position we remained for a long, weary time, the silence broken only by the reports of the muskets now and then, a shot from the thicket being answered by at least three from us, and when it seemed as if the night must be nearly at an end we had heard no cry of pain to tell that our missiles had taken effect, nor had we received harm. It was a bloodless skirmish in which no advantage could be gained by one side or the other, save in the way of expending ammunition, although all the time there was present in our minds the possibility that the enemy might try to creep up on us from some other direction.

"It is when the day breaks that we must have our wits about us," Gabriel whispered in my ear as he changed position so that it might be possible for us to converse privately. "Then those who are in the thicket should be able to see their targets while themselves remain concealed from view."

"But we are not going to stay here very long after daylight," I made reply.

"No more minutes than may be necessary to mount and ride away, but it is while we are getting ready for the flight — and it is nothing better than a flight — that we shall be in gravest danger."

"And it would serve us well right if we carried in our bodies a few of their bullets," I replied moodily, for the stupidity which we had displayed caused me to feel mighty sore. "After this night I reckon we Minute Boys had best talk less of what it is possible to do, and strive harder to carry out the plans of our leader."

"Now are you grown oversensitive, Rufus. We may say without boasting that not a little has been accomplished by us lads, and one mistake should not be of overly great weight in the balance."

"Well, you may figure it out as you please, strive to get all the comfort possible from the blunder, but as for me, whenever I am tempted to argue that our company might make a bold stroke, I shall remember this night's work and hold my peace."

Then Gabriel left off talking to me, as if irritated because I could speak of nothing save that which had just been done by us, and again the dreary dispiriting work of watching for a random flash, that we might fire blindly into the thicket, was resumed.

In much this same fashion was the entire night spent. When one or another would weary of his fruitless efforts to inflict injury, he strove to enter into conversation with the comrade nearest him, and, so far as I could learn, all the talk centred about the blunder of which we had been guilty.

Then came that lightening of the sky in the east which told that the long vigil was at an end. We no longer had time to discuss our faults, for it was a question of getting out of that trap alive, and all

realized full well the danger to which we would be exposed at the moment of mounting and riding up the trail. As a matter of course, the peril would be past in a few moments, for the horses could be sent forward at full speed, but it was that short interval, when our backs must perforce be turned to the foe, which caused even so brave a man as Master Sawyer no slight uneasiness.

So nervous had I become with thinking of those few seconds when we would be exposed to the fire of the enemy, that it was as if daylight came with a single bound after the first gray light of warning, and then, while I was yet asking myself how we were best to guard against the danger, Master Sawyer, no longer hesitating because of the blunder he had made, and without asking permission of Gabriel, took command of the company by saying:

"Now then, lads, move quickly, and do as I bid you. Each one is to mount his horse while keeping within the shelter of the shack as nearly as may be, and when the word is given, ride out along the trail at top speed."

Because of the words, I believed we were all to make a dash out of the trap, at the same time taking the chances of being hit, and striving only to get beyond range as soon as might be. Therefore I obeyed the command hurriedly, and once we were mounted Master Sawyer said to Gabriel:

"It is your duty to lead the company, lad, therefore ride in advance, and let the pace be a good one."

There was only one among us all who had an idea

that Master Sawyer intended to do other than ride with us, and that single doubter was Archie Gordon. When we were mounted and the horses headed up the trail, I noted that he held back, and said to him sharply:

"It is your station immediately in the rear of me, lad!"

"Ay, but this time I am riding with Master Sawyer."

"Go on, lad; get into line," I heard the gentleman say sharply, and Archie replied with a laugh:

"The other fellows have not suspected what you are about, but I am going to take my chances with you."

I saw Master Sawyer lay hold of the bridle of Archie's steed, and then there was no opportunity to observe more, for Gabriel gave the word and off we started like an arrow shot from the bow. The report of half a dozen muskets rang out at the same time, thus showing that the enemy were on the alert for our change of position.

I also understood from the answering reports that some of our fellows were firing, and, looking back, I saw greatly to my surprise that Master Sawyer and Archie yet remained near the shack, watching with muskets ready for the first of the Tories who should show himself.

Now it was I understood why Master Sawyer had thus taken command. He counted on atoning for his blunder by remaining behind until we were safely off, when he would have taken his own chances alone but for Archie, who guessed at the

plan and was determined to share with the gentleman some portion of the danger.

I could not have halted even if I would, because of those behind me, and during two or three minutes we lads rode on at our best speed, leaving in the rear those two brave hearts who were ready to sell their lives if needs be so that ours might be preserved.

It was a brave thing for Master Sawyer to have done, and yet braver for Archie Gordon to bear him company. The man was experienced in such work, but the lad green to the business; the one had a well-earned reputation to sustain, the other was making his — had made it that morning so far as we Minute Boys of South Carolina were concerned.

When our company had ridden so far that it seemed certain we were beyond musket-shot distance from the shack, Gabriel shouted for us to halt, and when we pulled up our steeds every fellow's face was turned to the rear, while I dare say all hearts were beating as was mine when we watched for the coming of those comrades whom there was every reason to believe we might never see again.

And yet they came through the danger safely. Within sixty seconds after we halted there sounded from the rear a shout of triumph, and immediately afterward we saw the two riding toward us at full speed, Archie yelling like a red Indian with the joy of having sat side by side with such a man as Master Sawyer at a time when death lurked near at hand.

Gabriel gave the word for us to ride on, when the two appeared in sight, and as we spurred the

horses forward every fellow cheered for Archie, forgetting, in the pride which was felt because of a comrade's heroism, that Master Sawyer had also voluntarily staked his life for ours.

Ten minutes later we were halted in front of the forge, but the place was abandoned, and Master Sawyer said, after he had dismounted and ascertained beyond a question that the smith was not in sight:

"When the opportunity affords it is our business, lads, to overhaul this Master Reuben Rowe, and if he still be of the mind to take neither one side nor the other, then will we give him a taste of what colorless people in such times as these deserve."

Again we rode on, heading directly for the Davis plantation, our faces lengthening as we drew nearer to it, for the time was rapidly approaching when we must confess to such as General Marion and Captain Horry that we had proven ourselves simples of the most simple type, and such prospect was not pleasing.

"There is but one way out of it," Gabriel said to me when he had slackened pace that we might ride side by side, and he spoke as if it had been the continuation of a previous conversation. "That is to own up at once, before there is opportunity for much question, that we have been fools."

"There is little need for many words in order to prove that," I replied with a mirthless laugh. "We have spent the night in showing your brother that the Minute Boys are not to be trusted out of his sight, and from this on we had best content our-

selves with doing sentinel duty around the encampment."

"No, no, lad, it is not so bad as you would paint it," Master Sawyer cried as, hearing my words, he spurred his horse alongside us two. "The fault lies with me, and it is I who will tell the story of this night's blunder. You have done as well, under all the circumstances, as could the best troopers the general has in his command; that I maintain stoutly. I question if any man lives who would not be forced to confess to a mistake now and then, and yet you are not required to do even that, since it was I who urged you to what I dare venture to say was against your better judgment. The whole amount of this night's work is that you failed to capture those who set a trap for you, and verily in that there can be no great crime."

Master Sawyer said very much more in the same strain, so bent was he on taking all the blame, and trying to convince us that after skulking the whole night under the guns of such Tories as Seth Hastings had been able to gather from out the mass of fugitives, we had done gallant work.

We knew the facts only too well, however, and when we rode up the lane to where we had encamped the afternoon previous, the dullest person on the plantation could have told by the expression on our faces that matters had gone awry.

Our words were pledged, however, to Master Sawyer, that he be allowed to make the report, and once in camp we set about feeding and grooming our horses, that we might be ready for whatsoever

change of base the commander counted on making.

We were soon to learn, however, that General Marion considered himself in a fairly secure position here on the Davis plantation, for before we had good opportunity of speaking with him concerning the misadventure of the night, it was whispered around among our men that word had been brought in regarding one of Colonel Wemyss's officers who was encamped near Lynch's Creek, having proceeded there with a considerable body of Tories under orders to force our people to a battle at all hazards. Those who brought such word also gave the welcome news that several squads of patriots were on their way to join us. By remaining where we were it would be possible, not only to yet further recruit our force, but make such preparations as might enable us to meet with a reasonable hope of success those renegades who believed they could whip us in a fair fight.

Therefore it was that we settled ourselves down to the hospitality which Master Davis so freely bestowed, for he was one of those patriots who stood ready to give up all he possessed with the hope of aiding the Cause, and had it been necessary I dare venture to say he would have been the first to apply the torch to his own property.

Before another night came we had an interview with General Marion, but there is no need I should say very much concerning it. Master Sawyer had given him all the details of the night's work, blaming himself, as we expected, more than was really

deserved, and the general said to us laughingly that he understood we were plunged into the depths of despondency because of failing to accomplish our purpose, when as a matter of fact there was no reason for us to grieve.

"Do not think that any one of this company will question your courage, lads, for you have already shown us what it is possible for you to do, and will give yet further proof when the occasion presents itself," he said laughingly, as he turned away to receive the report of some of the scouts who had just come in.

And now concerning the next four days there is no reason why I should set down anything, save to say that we remained quietly on the Davis plantation, hearing from those who were friendly to the Cause and living near at hand much concerning the movements of the enemy.

Then on the morning of the fifth day it was announced by those troopers who claimed to know full well all the plans our commander might make, that within another four and twenty hours we were to set off for the purpose of giving Captain Harrison the opportunity he professed to be aching for. There was never one among us who did not believe we could stand against twice our number of renegades, and whip them out of their boots.

So confident were these newsmongers that we began to make such few preparations as were possible for the coming march, but before the day was at an end we learned that which turned our attention for the time being elsewhere.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when friends of the Cause rode in with the information that the Tories were gathered in large force at Salem, near the fork of the Black River. Here, so it was reported, Colonel Tyne of the British service had appeared, summoning the people as subjects of his Majesty to take the field against their countrymen, and what served more than anything else to set us aflame was the report that he had brought with him ample supplies of war materials, provisions, and even of luxuries such as our people had not seen for many a month.

Eager though we were to measure strength with Harrison's Tories, the idea of new muskets with bayonets, broadswords and pistols, saddles and bridles, and powder and ball, which the Britisher had brought with him, caused our mouths to water.

Had General Maron declined to take advantage of such opportunity to give his force a new equipment as seemed suddenly to have presented itself, I believe the men under him, obedient and faithful as they had been, would have indulged in much murmuring, for they were sadly in need of many things which it was said lay near at hand for the taking.

An hour later came very definite information, and those who brought it were eager in their demands that our troop take possession of these stores, which were guarded only by a single company of redcoats. It was reported that Colonel Tyne had moved from Salem to Tarcote, on the fork of the Black River, and there had seemingly gone into regular camp,

being apparently so secure in mind regarding the safety of his position, that such watchfulness as common prudence would have dictated was neglected.

To sweep down and possess ourselves of these goods which were intended for the benefit of our enemies, was exactly the kind of work for which we were best adapted, and every man was in a fever to be at the task which was at one and the same time for the benefit of the Cause and the equipment of ourselves.

While the officers deliberated, the rank and file announced what articles they most needed, as if it were only necessary to make the statement in order to have their desires fulfilled. In fact, there was not one among us but that believed we could have for the choosing anything among Colonel Tyne's stores.

Perhaps we, as well as the Britishers, were becoming overconfident as to our strength. We knew beyond a peradventure that Tarleton with his legion would soon be at our heels after the last blow we delivered; that Harrison and his Tories were ahead of us, and this Colonel Tyne at our left, the three forces probably being so near each other that it would be possible for them to unite against us in a comparatively short time. Yet we gave little heed to any possibility save that we were to capture new equipments and stores.

A single company of redcoats seemed to us a force so small as to demand no very serious thought. Even us lads of the Minute Boys were

inclined to look upon the capture of Colonel Tyne's camp as nothing more than an incident in this odd warfare which we were carrying on, and because it proved really to be no more than we expected, I must not allow myself to give overly many words to the matter.

I believe it was in General Marion's mind to show that he had quite as much confidence in the Minute Boys as before we made the blunder, for on that very afternoon were we summoned to the dwelling, where we found our commander, Captain Horry, and a score or more of people of importance living nearabout.

Then it was that General Marion told us what we already knew concerning this Colonel Tyne, and asked that we select three of our company to reconnoitre the camp. Tarcote was only a trifle more than ten miles away, and we were to leave the Davis plantation two hours in advance of the troop, which would give us, if anything occurred to prevent our gaining the information desired, ample opportunty to double back on our trail and meet the " ragged regiment " at where they would be halted awaiting our return.

Gabriel made no reply on receiving this command, but, saluting, wheeled about and led the way toward where our horses were stabled, we following his example as a matter of course. Then, instead of going through the form of drawing lots, the leader simply announced to the company that he, Archie Gordon, and Rufus Randolph would act as the scouts, and the remainder of the company were to

fall in line with General Marion's command when they set off.

It can well be fancied how determined we were to do our work faithfully on this night in order to atone for what we yet insisted was a grievous blunder, and off we rode as quickly as might be, exchanging no words until well away from the plantation. Then, instead of talking about what we were to do, we spoke of the past, and of how thoroughly we would whip Harrison's Tories; but keeping silent upon the purpose of our ride, not because we feared to lose courage, but that each fellow seemed to have it in mind to act and speak as if this work was so easily performed as to not need discussion or comment.

And in fact so did it prove. When we were come near to Tarcote the horses were left in a convenient thicket, and we crept cautiously forward to reconnoitre. But, bless you, we might almost have walked boldly through the camp, so carelessly was it guarded. As a matter of fact we approached within ear-shot at a dozen points, and failed, strange as it may seem, to find a single sentinel on guard.

These redcoats were living on the fat of the land, and with all the luxuries at their command. They had an ample supply of new canvas tents, and in these were men playing at cards or sleeping, while around the camp-fires lounged squads drinking and smoking as if they were simply out on a picnic. In a dwelling near by the officers were having a feast, carousing as if their one purpose was to so befuddle their senses that the Swamp Fox and his followers

might work their will without danger and at ease.

The reconnoissance was attended with as little peril as if we three had gone out sightseeing with our friends, and although I am not counting myself as being a particularly courageous lad, yet I was utterly ashamed of having accomplished the task so readily.

When we stole away, not overly careful as to making a noise, and were mounting our horses, Gabriel said with a laugh, as if he had forgotten that we allowed Seth Hastings to make fools of us:

"If all the Minute Boys had been with us, I dare venture to say we alone could have captured the camp, providing we waited until those sots were a little deeper in their cups. As it is, we have only to report to the general that the goods which Colonel Tyne brought for the Tories are at his disposal whenever he chooses to take them."

CHAPTER XVII

SETH HASTINGS ONCE MORE

If I were given to boasting I might set down many words describing what we said and did before moving upon Colonel Tyne's camp, but it was such an insignificant affair that I would be ashamed to give any space to it, but for the fact that it is necessary to explain how we were able to equip the force completely and with the best of goods.

From having seen the men carousing in their tents with never a sentinel stationed anywhere around, and the officers befuddling their brains with liquor, we knew beyond a peradventure there could be no desperate fight, yet we were not prepared for that which followed.

After acquainting the general with what we had learned, Gabriel, Archie, and I fell back in the rear to join the Minute Boys, and a moment later the word to advance was given. We were then not over a mile and a half from the encampment, and I was surprised that no effort was made toward advancing in silence.

As usual General Marion and Captain Horry rode in advance at a sharp trot, and the remainder of the troop followed close behind them. Thus we

went on, never drawing rein until we were in the very midst of the redcoats, who were running here and there in helpless panic like so many ants on whose nest you have put your foot.

It may seem like boasting, yet it is only the naked truth that we did not discharge a weapon nor draw a sabre until the fugitives were directly under the horses' noses, and then our men forbore to strike those bewildered, imitation soldiers because it was more like murdering in cold blood, than warfare.

Bless you, they made no resistance whatsoever. There was never the slightest attempt, so far as I could see, to stand against us. If the officers did not lead in the retreat, it was because they were so befuddled with liquor that it was impossible for them to keep pace set by those who first fled. The gallant Colonel Tyne fell a prisoner to us because the scabbard of his sword, dangling between his drunken legs, sent him headlong, whereupon one of our troopers, bending from the saddle, literally hauled the half-stupefied officer on to his horse's back, and, if you please, held him there while we rode yet farther across the encampment.

Had we been so minded, and had ammunition in plenty, we might have slain nine out of every ten of that mob without receiving a blow in return. Those who were not intoxicated with liquor, were so befuddled by fear as to be incapable of resistance. It was only possible for them to run, and the swiftness of their pace was measured by their temperance or excesses.

It is also true that we were literally forced to take

prisoners when we understood that anything of the kind was to be avoided, for having overriden two or three squads of them, we found the cravens huddled together and shrieking for mercy when we returned, consequently there was nothing left save accept their surrender.

It was the greatest farce of an attack a man could dream of, and we were actually so ashamed of being able to do much as we pleased, that instead of pursuing those frightened wretches who were heading for the swamp just north of Tarcote, orders were given us to return and gather up the plunder.

"We will camp here this night," Captain Horry said, after holding a brief conversation with General Marion immediately we were returned from the feint at pursuit. "We will camp here with the hope that some of those gallant Tories may have recovered from their drunken stupor sufficiently to give us a taste of their metal, for this time instead of avoiding an engagement, General Marion desires one, in order that we may get our hands in before paying a visit to Harrison."

Well, we fell upon the encampment like a party of schoolboys, laughing and shouting in our glee, while the prisoners, guarded only by three men, watched us curiously.

Word was passed that all the members of the force should take whatsoever fancy might dictate, it being stipulated, however, that no man would be allowed to carry anything away save what he or his horse might wear. Once this was known our steeds were decked out with new saddles and bridles in a

twinkling, while more than half of our party sported English uniforms taken in exchange for the rags which gave the name to our regiment.

The abundance of everything we found there made us fastidious, and you would see a trooper who an hour previous had been well content to use a musket the stock of which was tied together with cords, balancing this weapon or that in his hands to see which might be the best fitted for his use, or come across some grizzled woodsman trying to decide between a private's crimson headgear and an officer's lighter hat, that he might learn which was most becoming to his weather-beaten face.

There is no need for me to say that we were so forgetful of our precious selves as to fail in setting guards closely around the camp, and during the first two hours these sentinels were changed as often as once in every ten minutes, to the end that each fellow might have full opportunity with his comrades to get a new equipment.

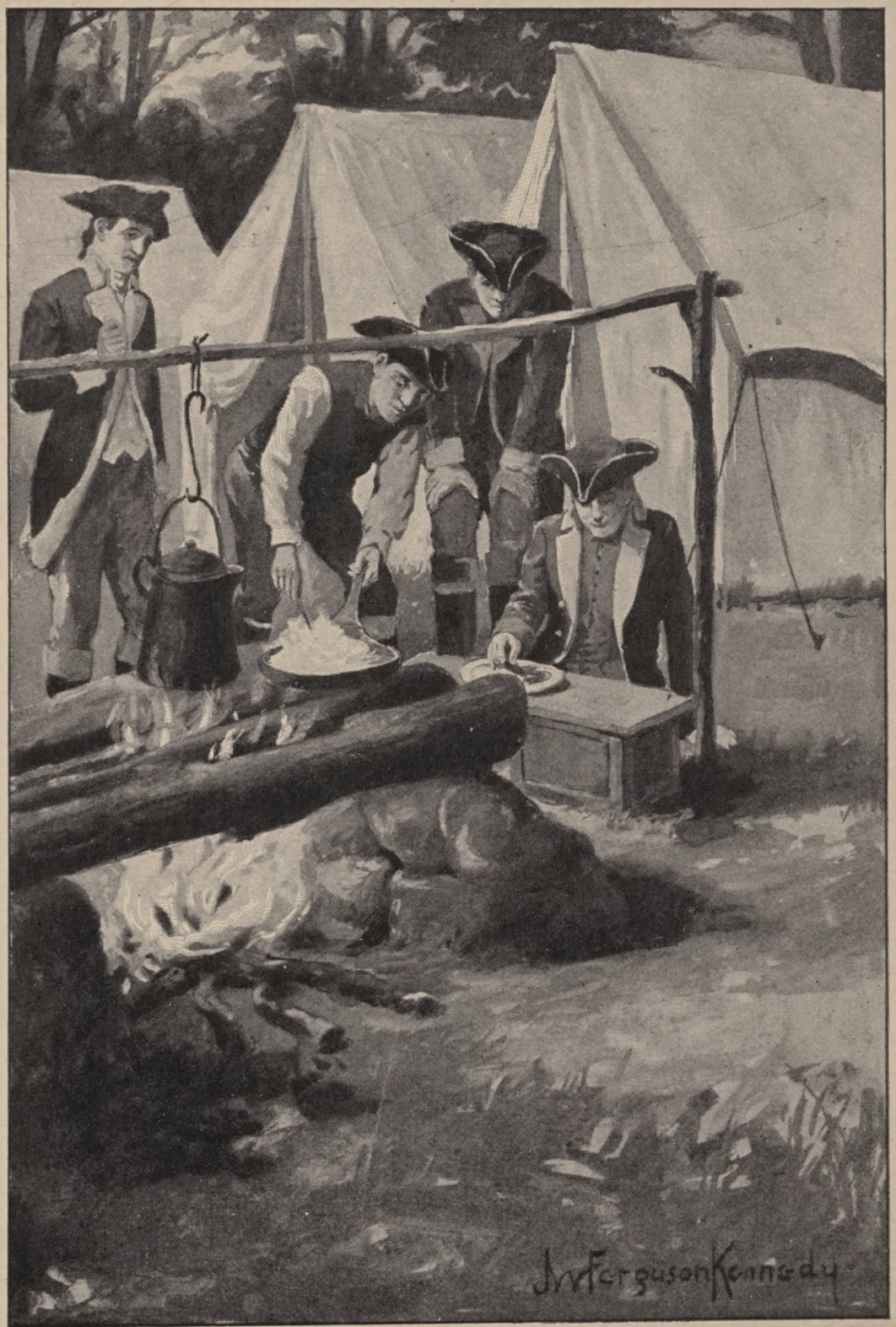
It must have been midnight before we were done with the horse-play, and then we took possession of the canvas tents so generously provided by the king, but not for our comfort, and every member of the troop found himself housed more luxuriously than since the day Charleston was taken.

We Minute Boys arranged four of the tents in line to make a single large one where all could find shelter, and in addition, so plentiful were these luxuries, we set up a canvas roof for the horses, surprising those patient animals with the plentiful amount of provender which was dealt out to them.

To me it was very strange, when we had arranged quarters to suit ourselves and gathered up from the profusion of stores as much provisions as would have served twice our number a full week, to see an expression of something like disappointment on the faces of all. Never were soldiers provided with such luxuries as we at that time; never had the troops won such an easy victory, and yet there was something lacking, as we all felt. We were not blood-thirsty by any manner of means, but it almost shamed us that we had been allowed to work our will in the encampment, and what every member of our company felt was voiced by Archie Gordon when he said:

"If there had been only one bloody-back, or a single Tory, however crippled, who would have stood up and exchanged shots with us, I should be better satisfied this minute. To be living here like princes without having spent a single charge of ammunition is much like cheating, and while you fellows will find that I won't shirk when it comes time to eat, these stores paid for by the king would taste a deal better if we had really earned them."

So much for our visit — it cannot be called an attack — upon Colonel Tyne. How we lads slept that night! When our beds had been the bare earth, and our blankets only so much of dew as fell from the heavens, we were up and stirring at the first crack of day. But here with a rain-defying covering over us, and a plentiful supply of straw beneath us, it was really painful to be forced to go out and attend to the regular camp duties. I had an idea that even



"'AND WE ARE TO LEAVE ALL THESE CAMP EQUIPMENTS?'"

the horses would have been better content had we left them to their repose, instead of disturbing them by pouring in front of each a full day's supply of grain.

"It is too bad," Archie said as he took upon himself the duties of cook by dexterously toasting slices of sweet bacon in front of the fire Jared Green had built, "that we are to leave all these luxuries so soon. I would truly love to learn by eight and forty hours' experience how the darling soldiers of the king fare, when not running away from the enemy."

"Then it is in your mind that we shall break camp at once?" Jacob Breen asked, as he threw himself at full length opposite a plate of bark in which Archie was depositing the bacon as fast as it was cooked, and slyly taking therefrom now and then a particularly choice slice when Master Gordon was not looking.

"It is in my mind, but not of my mind," Archie replied. "General Marion is not the kind of a commander who dwaddles away his time in such a place as this. If peradventure we were in the Black Mingo with not enough of dry land on which a fellow might plant both of his feet at the same time, then would there be a possibility of our remaining undisturbed; but as it is, I am counting we will be lucky if it does not become necessary to eat this bacon while in the saddle."

"And we are to leave all these camp equipments for the next bunch of Tories that comes along?"

"I am reckoning they will be burned, unless orders are given to the contrary."

"And why should you destroy what so many of our soldiers up North are needing most woefully?" a cheery voice cried, and turning, Archie saw Captain Horry, who had come up from behind the tent and was sniffing at the air so heavily laden with the odor of fried bacon.

"The general said last night that nothing could be carried away, so it stands to reason he is counting on leaving all these fashionable articles of warfare, and it seems a pity to let a crowd of renegades in where honest men have spent the night."

"I am reckoning, Master Minute Boy, that very much will be done toward saving this plunder, with the exception of what the men have already appropriated," Captain Horry said with a laugh. "Already some of the troopers have been sent out with the hope of finding wagons in which the goods can be transported to Kingstree."

"And why to that place?" Jacob Breen asked.

"Because word has been brought that Colonel Baker is there with considerable of a following, and it is believed he may be able to hold the place while we are keeping the redcoats busy in this section."

"It is a big relief to know that the stuff is not to be left behind," Archie said, "though I *would* like to try the experiment of sleeping another night in such a shelter as that."

"And so you may, lad," the captain replied, helping himself to some of Archie's bacon. "Even if the general was so disposed, it would not be possible to send forward these stores immediately, and there is little doubt but that we shall remain in

camp three or four days before the quarters of the Minute Boys are disturbed."

"Well, say, that's great news, captain! Take more of the bacon — take it all, and I will keep right on toasting to repay you for the information. Three or four days here will be just like a dream, although I am not so sure but it will come all the harder for us when we strike once more such a nest in the swamp as the commander likes to pick out."

Captain Horry had not paid us this visit simply from motives of curiosity, but in order to send two of our company back to the Davis plantation with word regarding the success, and that Master Davis might be urged to forward as many wagons for the transportation of the goods as he could come at conveniently.

It was simply to carry a message where there was naught of danger to be encountered, or honor to be won, and I who had listened to the conversation just set down, was careful not to make myself too conspicuous lest I be signalled out as one of the couriers, for, like Archie Gordon, I had a great desire to spend all the time possible in such an encampment as I had never before seen.

"Who will ride to the plantation?" Gabriel cried, and straightway Jacob Breen and Jared Green offered themselves as volunteers. Archie winking at me quizzically as the boys rose to their feet eager for the service, thus giving me to understand that he was no more inclined to absent himself from our snug quarters than I.

What a breakfast we made that morning, we Minute Boys! After our hunger was satisfied we ate for the sake of eating, until it seemed absolutely impossible to swallow another mouthful, and then, as do the hogs, we lay down to sleep, giving no heed to the fact that our company had not been called upon to furnish sentinels, as should have been the case. Under other circumstances we would have been jealous because of this apparent neglect, for we were eager to do our full duty as soldiers, but not one gave it thought, and we spent our time as idly as if we had been Tories instead of Minute Boys who had sworn to defend the Cause even to the extent of yielding up our lives.

Toward noon Gabriel and two or three other lads lounged over to the dwelling where General Marion had his quarters, but Archie and I remained within the tent, save at such times as it was necessary to look after the horses, for we were minded to take all the comfort we might, and because there was nothing better to do, we fell to talking about Seth Hastings, of the trap he laid, or the triumph which was probably his because we had gone into it like simples, until Archie said petulantly:

"The very name of that villain gives me a bad taste in my mouth, and it is the next thing to crime to talk about him while we are so snugly housed."

"How much pleasure would you find in sitting here if so be we knew beyond a peradventure that the cur was within a dozen miles of us?" I asked laughingly, and he replied quickly:

"If there was one chance out of ten that he might

be within thirty miles, and we were given permission to set off in pursuit of him, I would agree never to go into a camp like this so long as I might remain in the service."

Just then we heard the thud of horses' feet outside, and started up in no little surprise, for the animals were approaching rapidly, as if their riders were impatient to arrive at the earliest possible moment. Then looking out from the flaps of the tent, we saw that Jacob and Jared had returned.

"Were you afraid that we might get more than our share of the plunder that you have ridden so fast?" Archie asked, looking at the horses, which were covered with foam as if having been ridden at full speed.

"We were in a hurry to get back," Jacob replied, as he dismounted, pulling off the saddle and bridle that his weary steed might roll at will upon the grass, "and we are bringing news which concerns all the Minute Boys," he added, whereupon Archie came out of the tent quickly as he cried:

"You have heard regarding Seth Hastings?"

"Ay, so it would seem, although we may have mistaken some other for him."

"Tell us what you know?" I cried impatiently. "Don't stand there mouthing your words as if they were sweet to the taste."

"It may be that in our eagerness to pay off scores with Seth Hastings I have jumped at conclusions and overleaped the mark; but of that you shall decide," Jacob said hurriedly. "When we were come to the plantation and had described to Master

Davis how easily we sent the Tories flying, he declared we deserved a rich reward for bringing such tidings. He gave it by telling us that at daybreak this very morning the smith, Master Reuben Rowe, had come to him declaring that a party of boys had the same as accused him of being in league with enemies to the Cause. Now it seems that Master Rowe had no intention of proving he was a patriot, but wanted rather to make it plain he was holding neutral, as he ever claimed to do. He told Master Davis that hearing the noise of firing during the night from the direction of the old negro's shack, he set off to learn what might have been done; he was coming up the trail when we appeared, and stepped aside in the thicket lest we do him injury. Shortly after he came within sight, while he himself was hidden by the foliage, of five men and a boy, all armed and making their way cautiously toward the highway. These he followed until they struck across the country, avoiding the Davis plantation, going in the direction of Tarcote, and it was his belief that, having learned of Colonel Tyne's encampment at that place, they were counting on joining him."

"Therefore you see," Jared interrupted, thinking it was proper he should bear his full share of the conversation, "that the lad we are so eager to lay hand on may be near about. Certain it is he was in the negro's shack when we rode up so foolishly, and it is equally true the villain must go somewhere to find the king's friends, for by this time he does not dare make himself known to any who serve the

Cause. Jacob and I have almost come to believe that even at this moment Seth Hastings and his four Tory companions may be travelling this way all ignorant of the fact that our people are in possession of the encampment. A rich joke would it be if the scoundrel walked in here believing he might find those who would give him shelter and food because of his treason."

I was aflame on the instant. I could see nothing untrue or strained in this story of Master Rowe's that he was anxious to prove he had not given aid to the Tories, because, once suspected of so doing, Master Davis would have made reprisals beyond question. Therefore it was I believed his story implicitly.

Perhaps because I wanted to believe such a thing, it seemed to me positive Tarcote was Seth Hastings's destination, and unless he ran across some of those whom we had driven out of the encampment, then was there good chance he might come on all ignorant of what had taken place, until getting a glimpse of us who were in possession.

"We must tell Gabriel and the rest of the company," I said excitedly. "Wait here and I will fetch them."

Then I ran with all speed to the commander's quarters, finding there Gabriel and half a dozen of my companions, whom I summoned without loss of time by saying:

"Jacob and Jared have brought in great news. Come at once to our quarters!"

They could understand full well from my appear-

ance that something of moment was in the wind, and I had no reason to complain of their delay.

Five minutes later the Minute Boys were gathered, and Jacob repeated his story. My comrades were quite as highly excited as was I, and never one of them doubted the truth of the information, or that it related to the lad we were so eager to get into our clutches.

In a twinkling, forgetting that because of having walked into the trap which the traitorous cur laid for us we had vowed never to go out as a company of Minute Boys on our own account, we at once began to argue as to how we might turn this news to advantage. More than one believed we should set out in skirmish line, advancing two or three miles from the encampment in the direction from which we believed the cur would come, and there await him.

I was of this number. If the scoundrel came up until having seen our people, he would make his escape, and we would be culpable because of having lingered in camp without taking some steps toward welcoming him in proper fashion.

Unfortunately as it then seemed — and I still hold that the disaster which finally came to us might have been averted if we had set off in search of Seth Hastings at once — the day was destined to be one of excitement, for before we could decide upon a plan satisfactory to all, two men, well known to be friends to the Cause, rode into camp with information of the highest importance.

It was rumored among the people of George-

town, so the newcomers said, that Lord Cornwallis had begged Tarleton to make an end of General Marion, with the result that the infamous butcher had arisen from a bed of sickness brought on by his own excesses, with a vow that he would capture the "scurvy Swamp Fox," and at once sent word to his legion, which was before Camden, with orders to meet him on the Wateree River, from whence he would set out to capture our general.

We lads did not hear this report made, but several of the troopers were present at the interview, and reported that our general said in reply:

"We will make Colonel Tarleton's commission as easy of accomplishment as possible, so far as the whereabouts of the 'Swamp Fox' is concerned."

Of course this was the same as saying that General Marion intended to set off to meet the butcher Tarleton half-way.

We Minute Boys were greatly perplexed immediately all this was made known, for if the troopers were to break camp then would our plan for capturing Seth Hastings come to naught, although Archie boldly declared we had the right, under all the circumstances, to separate ourselves from the "ragged regiment," if such should be our desire, and the pity of it is, as I look back now, that we did not listen more attentively to his advice.

We were yet discussing this information when some of the troopers who had been sent out as scouts returned, bringing word that a large number of Britishers were on the road from Camden, evidently destined for Georgetown. It had not been

possible to discover what troops these might be, but, taken in connection with the information already received, they were probably a portion, if not the whole, of Tarleton's Legion. This therefore confirmed the news already received.

Immediately our people set about making ready for a move without waiting for word or command, because the reply which the general gave to those who told him of Tarleton's purpose was sufficient to show his intention.

Of course, had we lads been long enough in the service to realize better what a soldier's duties are, there would have been no question in our minds as to what must be done, but as it was, holding ourselves as an independent command, and believing it remained with our leader to say whether he would obey orders of the general or not, a discussion arose as to what we should do.

Seeing that Gabriel was pained because we had even the slightest idea of breaking away from his brother, I did not take any very great part in the discussion, which at one time seemed about to terminate in favor of Archie Gordon's proposition, which was that our sole duty should be to find the lad who would have worked us so much harm.

However, Gabriel's prayers, for he did condescend to beg of his comrades, finally prevailed, and we agreed to do that which should have been plain before us at the outset, for, having joined General Marion's force at our own good pleasure, we had no right to leave it for private ends.

It is necessary I set down here the fact that at

this time, when we were making ready to march toward Tarleton lest he should have difficulty in finding us, the "ragged regiment" increased wondrously in size. It is not possible to state the exact number of men comprising it, but I should say we were not less than six hundred strong, all mounted and well armed, thanks to Colonel Tyne's stores, and with a fairly good supply of ammunition.

Because we had not as yet been repulsed, but had found it much the same as child's play to take possession of any encampment we chanced upon, our people were confident we could successfully cope with a force two or three times as large as our own. Therefore were we overconfident, which is sometimes as much of a crime as cowardice.

However eager he was to come up with Tarleton, General Marion did not intend to leave so much property behind him for the benefit of the Tories whom we knew must be lurking near about, nor was he minded to destroy it.

Six of our people were ordered to remain until wagons should be sent, so that as many of the goods as possible might be carried to Kingstree. It was easier to give such a command than to carry it out, for with only six to guard what must be tempting bait for those whom we had despoiled, it would not be any desperate venture to overcome them, and I questioned very seriously whether the half-dozen brave fellows who had volunteered for such dangerous service would ever be seen by us again.

CHAPTER XVIII

MANOEUVRING FOR POSITION

I HAVE already set it down that our people were much the same as wild with delight when it seemed probable we were about to set off in search of Colonel Tarleton, lest he might have some difficulty in finding us who were eager to meet him, and the greater number of our "ragged regiment" firmly believed we would give battle wheresoever we chanced to come upon the enemy.

I myself fancied, as did Gabriel, that our commander, believing his force sufficient to warrant acting on the offensive, would turn the tables by hunting Tarleton, when the truth was, as I learned later, that General Marion made a change of base in order to have choice of the battle-field, taking good care to arrange everything in his favor, if that might be possible, before trying conclusions.

That which was done during the week or two following our abandonment of the encampment provided for us by Colonel Tyne, proved that General Marion was an able soldier, and the fact that he came to grief in this one case does not detract in any little degree, so I have heard military authorities say, from his reputation.

If we Minute Boys had known that the order to break camp had been given simply because the

general was not willing to meet Tarleton's force at Tarcote, and that we were setting off only in order to manœuvre for position, as the captain of a ship jockeys to get weather gauge of his adversary, then it is certain we would have left the force sufficiently long to have one more try at capturing Seth Hastings. Had we done so, we might have saved a life that had become very dear to us, and much of the history concerning the Carolinas in the year of grace 1781 would have been written in a different strain.

Unfortunately, as it has ever seemed to me, we were in ignorance of the true reason for abandoning Colonel's Tyne's encampment, and believed it our duty to hold with the "ragged regiment," to the end that we might do our full share of the fighting which seemed so near at hand.

Our horses were in good condition when we set off at sunset, leaving behind us all that store of plunder under guard of the brave fellows who had undertaken to hold it even when they knew that if any body of the enemy came up they must necessarily be killed or taken prisoners — which last was a worse fate than that of death. Every man among us was eager to measure strength with that human brute, Tarleton, who had devastated the Carolinas wherever he marched, and, because of the success which had been ours, we believed we might make an attempt under any condition, however disadvantageous, with the certainty of besting him.

We rode swiftly that night, and all the next

day, hardly drawing rein save to water and feed our horses, until arriving once more at Nelson's Ferry. This was the second time we had crossed the entire district of Williamsburg with a speed such as astounded the British horsemen, and it is little wonder that our general had received from them the name in which we of the "ragged regiment" gloried.

Exactly how strong the enemy were there was no means of knowing, although one might guess that Tarleton would not come out with less than his full legion, which numbered upward of eleven hundred men, but yet we pressed forward even after having come upon their trail until the moment arrived when it would have been folly to advance farther, because our horses were winded.

Then we made camp in the thicket, Gabriel complaining bitterly because his brother had called a halt, although the steed which the lad bestrode could not have kept his feet an hour longer.

With the enemy so near at hand, for Tarleton was reported to be no more than ten miles away, it was necessary to take every precaution at this encampment, and we were yet hard at work throwing up rude breastworks such as would suffice for the use of the sharpshooters, when Colonel Richardson, who had served under General Sumter until wounded and then retired to his plantation, came up.

He brought definite information regarding the strength and position of the enemy, and because our general did not appear to be greatly alarmed

after the story had been told, he cried passionately:

"You can easily be surrounded here, and, with such a force as Tarleton has, must be cut to pieces, however bravely your men may fight! To make a stand now would be useless sacrifice of life, and I beg of you, General Marion, to seek a more advantageous place in which to meet the enemy, for if your regiment be defeated now, it will be a death-blow to the Cause in the Carolinas."

Our people were hardly such idiots as to fail of understanding that talk like this from an experienced officer, one known to be a staunch friend to the Cause, was not to be disregarded, and, therefore, were prepared for the order which came half an hour later.

It was known that General Marion had every confidence in the opinion of the colonel, and was counting on following it, when the word was passed for those who were at work on the barricades to cease labor that the horses might be given due care in the hope they would be able to travel yet a few miles farther. The men were told to make a hurried meal, and this last command had, in many cases, not yet been obeyed, when the order was given to mount.

In less than an hour from the time Colonel Richardson came into the encampment, we were urging our jaded steeds through that gloomy swamp known as the "wood-yard," and, two hours later, the command was halted on the bank of Jack's Creek.

We had covered only six miles in all that time, owing to the condition of the horses, but it was sufficient, so far as eluding the Britishers was concerned, because they might not come across us unless, perchance, that traitor among our number — he who had aided Seth Hastings in escaping — found opportunity to send back word to the Britishers, and that was a possibility which our officers had ever kept in mind since it was known we had in our ranks one who would serve the king at the first safe chance.

While Colonel Tarleton was a butcher — one who had no idea of mercy or compassion — it is only just to give him credit of being a good soldier after his own particular fashion. As a man to lead hard-riders, he was perhaps the best in the king's service, and we who were now fleeing before him understood that not a single moment would be lost in the pursuit if he had an inkling of our whereabouts.

Ride as fast and as long as we might, his men would ever be at our heels, while they could hold the pace, and it was endurance and the speed of the horses which would give the final result.

Therefore it was that from the moment when, at Colonel Tyne's old encampment, it was known the Britishers were devoting all their efforts to the one purpose of crushing the "ragged regiment," not a man of the command, save those whom General Marion knew personally were devoted heart and soul to the Cause, were allowed to leave the ranks or the camps. The sentinels were selected

from such of the regiment as had been proven beyond a doubt, and the word passed at all times was that an alarm should be given without delay if any one lagged behind on the march, or attempted to stray beyond the lines marked out for the encampment.

During this last painful, but short, march, we Minute Boys had been ordered to bring up the rear, that we might guard against straggling on the part of our people, and all along the line rode men whose duty it was to shoot down without warning any one who did not hold his designated place in the ranks.

The fear of what that single traitor whom we had reason to believe was among us, would be able to do, was far greater than that of meeting all the redcoats Tarleton could bring against us, for the rank and file of our "ragged regiment" had not yet come to understand why we might fail to ride at ease through any body of the enemy that opposed our advance.

At daybreak our brigade was on the march once more, the men weary to the verge of exhaustion, and the horses so jaded that they appeared unable to continue, even at a walk, a single mile farther. But yet we kept on over bogs and through swamps until arriving at Benbow's Ferry, about ten miles above Kingstree, where was a strong natural camp.

It was a place with which we were familiar. It commanded the ferry, and as within easy riding distance of all the country roundabout from which we must draw provisions and provender. As a

rallying point it could not have been equalled in the Carolinas, and should we be hard pressed there were three difficult passes through the swamp in the rear where, if necessary, we might make a stubborn fight.

Strong as was this position, General Marion set about strengthening it yet further. Trees were felled, breastworks built, and in eight and forty hours we were prepared to hold our own against Tarleton's much-vaunted legion, reasoning that our defences made up for lack of numbers until we were fully the enemy's equal.

By this time those of our people who had been most confident in their ability to whip any force of the Britishers that might be sent against us were beginning to realize the mistake. Every one knew that General Marion was a leader who would willingly take desperate chances, and if he was doubtful of the issue, then did it seem reasonable to believe there was good cause for prudence. Again, Colonel Richardson's reputation was such that no person could accuse him of being over-cautious, and, take it all in all, we of the "ragged regiment" were coming to understand that while we had had wonderful success thus far, we were not as formidable as many had fancied.

Now, however, we were convinced that a decisive battle would soon be fought, but it was not destined that the struggle in the Carolinas should be brought to so speedy a conclusion.

Tarleton pursued our "ragged regiment," having learned that we were much the same as fleeing

before him, losing time here and there to burn dwellings which sheltered only women and children, until he was come to within less than twelve miles of our camp, when, to the surprise of enemies as well as friends, he turned suddenly about, marching with all speed to Camden.

It was afterward said by the Tories that Lord Cornwallis had expressly ordered him to return, but more than one of our company believed the red-coated Britisher, who could be so courageous when he had none but old men, boys, and women in front of him, was actually afraid to measure strength in a fair battle with General Marion, and our spirits rose accordingly.

While we remained here in camp with safety, gathering numbers every day, much was done by our friends in other parts of the State. General Sumter gave battle to Tarleton at the Blackstock farm on the banks of the Tyger, defeating him utterly, but at a terrific loss, so far as the Cause was concerned. The Britishers had ninety-two killed and one hundred and four wounded. The patriots lost only three killed and four wounded, but in the latter list was the general himself, who had been severely injured in the breast by a British bullet. His men, true to him as was our "ragged regiment" to General Marion, lashed him in the raw hide of a bullock slung as a litter between two horses, and thus, guarded by a hundred picked men, he was carried to the upper part of the State, where, so we were told, he lay hovering 'twixt life and death.

At this time, also, was fought the battle of King's Mountain, when the British under Major Ferguson were defeated handsomely, the killed, wounded, and captured of the enemy amounting to eleven hundred men, and among the dead was the major himself.

And now, after the "ragged regiment" had remained inactive near two weeks, and the Minute Boys were eating their hearts out because they could not go in search of Seth Hastings even at the risk of meeting Tarleton's men, our leaders decided that the time had come when we must show that lingering long in camp had not made us timid.

The British post at Georgetown was the one place which our people of the Carolinas most needed as a base of operations against Charleston, and, in fact, to hold our own in the Williamsburg district. Situated as it was, we were constantly menaced while the enemy held possession of the place. In addition to that, it was a depot of supplies of salt, clothing, and ammunition for the king's troops, and the capture of the goods would be a severe blow to the Britishers.

To take Georgetown would be an exploit such as might advantage the Cause more than had the victory of King's Mountain, therefore it was to this end our general proposed to bend all his energies. It was believed the enemy lay at Georgetown in great force, perhaps to the number of four thousand men, and we knew full well the nature of the fortifications round about the post. A direct assault would have been fatal to us. It was only

by such methods as had won for our general the name of "Swamp Fox" that we could succeed, and, as can well be fancied, none of our people was averse to the attempt, believing so far as backwoods strategy was concerned, we were far superior to any of the king's forces.

The first we Minute Boys knew of what it was proposed to do was when, much to our relief, we broke camp, carrying with us all our equipage and so much of provisions as could be gathered, crossing the Black River at Potato Ferry, thus advancing toward Georgetown by that road known as "Gap Way."

Now this much as regards Georgetown must be understood: Three miles from that post is an inland swamp known as White's Bay, which, discharging itself by two mouths, the one into the Black River and the other into Sampit, completely cuts off the post, which stands on the north side of the last named river, near its junction with Winyaw Bay. Over the creek that empties into the Sampit is a bridge, two miles from the town.

Our Minute Boys were in high feather at the prospect of seeing active service, for we were weary with loitering in camp and, as a matter of course, we hoped by taking to the field once more it would be possible to satisfy the one desire of our hearts — the recapture of that Tory cur who had escaped us so readily. In fact, we had come to think more of taking him, while eating out our hearts at Benbow's Ferry, than of what we might do for the Cause.

There was no need we should be told where an attack was to be made, once we had come into the road leading to Georgetown. Every member of the force knew how eager our commander was to get possession of that post, and, looking around, I could see every fellow's face lighten with joy as he came to realize that at last we were to try for so great a stake, instead of spending our time upon a few squads of Tories.

From the moment of starting until we halted in the rear of the swamp known as White's Bay, the orders had been strict against straggling, and it was well known that whosoever should venture to move out of the line ever so slightly would be shot down. And this to the end that the traitor whom we had among us might not be able to ride on in advance for the purpose of giving information. Therefore did we feel reasonably sure it would be possible to come upon the enemy by surprise, but in case we failed to do so, then the chances would be heavily against us.

This last halt placed us within three miles of Georgetown, and that our commander would make an effort to ride straight through the Britishers, trusting to throw them into a panic of fear at the outset, we had good reason for believing since it was his favorite method of attack. Proof that this was to be so came when the word was passed for every trooper to look carefully after his horse in anticipation of the work before us, when the speed of the animals would, perhaps, avail even more than the accuracy of our aim.

It was near to ten o'clock at night when Captain Horry in a low voice summoned the men to form in a square around him and General Marion, to the end that arrangements be made for the coming work. When we were thus assembled the captain said, speaking so that every man might hear:

"Two squads of twenty men each are needed for particularly dangerous work such as may, perhaps, ensure the death of all. Because of this, volunteers are called for, and I ask that such of you as are so minded to sacrifice their own lives for the good of the Cause and safety of the brigade will step forward two paces."

Gabriel, Archie, and myself were standing side by side at the time, and it was as if each had the same thought in his mind, for we three moved as one. Then, turning my head ever so slightly, in order to learn what the others were doing, a flood of joy such as was like to have choked me came into my heart when I saw that every man and boy among us had advanced two paces, thus showing that those who followed General Marion were ready to sacrifice everything, even life itself, for the advancement of the Cause.

"You be brave lads, all!" Captain Horry said, as he looked about him, and there was an expression of keenest delight on the general's face. "Your courage has been proven again and again, and because of the past every one is entitled to the honor of sacrificing his life for the others, but only forty can be used in the movement. Therefore I ask that such of you as are minded to forego your own de-

sires to those of your comrades will step back two paces."

Not a man moved; every trooper remained firmly in place as if he and he alone should be the one to give up his life for the others, and among these brave men our Minute Boys — comrades all who were destined that night to see one of our number foully murdered while yet we were powerless to raise a hand in his defence.

Then it was General Marion's turn to speak, and it seemed to me that his face was actually lighted up with pleasure as he said in a low tone, but so clear that we could hear distinctly every word:

"I have good reason to know how true and brave are you of the 'ragged regiment,' but because it is possible those who volunteer for this dangerous service may be cut down to a man, I cannot allow more than forty to ride on in advance. Therefore I ask that such of you as have wives, families, or any helpless ones depending upon you for support, step back as Captain Horry has said, for I repeat that those who go take more than an even chance never to return, and we must not make more widows and orphans than may be absolutely necessary to the Cause."

Again the men held firm, never one giving way, although considerably more than half the troopers were men of families.

General Marion looked around him again with pride, and once more he spoke, but this time in a tone of command:

"I admit that you have equal right to the honor,

but a choice must be made, and in making it I shall show favoritism by selecting those whose death will be mourned by the fewest. To that end as your names are called, advance two more paces." Then he cried out sharply, "Gabriel Marion!"

My heart beat furiously, fearing lest we two lads were to be separated in the time of danger, but before there was opportunity to give much heed, I heard my own name called, and while stepping proudly forward to the side of our leader, Archie Gordon was summoned; then the two Marshall Boys, and the selection from the ranks of the Minute Boys had been made.

Beginning with the troopers, General Marion called first for Master Sawyer, and then rapidly, as if time was precious, he made up the list until the forty who were to go, perhaps, down into the flood of that dark river which lies between us and the other world, were standing in the centre of the hollow square triumphantly happy, as if life was a thing to be thrown heedlessly away, while all their comrades gazed at them enviously.

Then it was that Captain Horry stepped in front of our chosen company, and said almost in a whisper:

"You know, because of what has been told you, that the chances are much against your seeing another sun rise. Therefore I ask if there be any who have a request to make ere it be too late, pledging my word that such wishes shall be sacredly carried out."

There was silence for a minute, and then one man asked that word might be sent to his people stating he had volunteered for the service; another desired that in case he was killed a certain comrade should care for his horse; and so on until, mayhap, half a dozen had spoken, and then during a few seconds was there perfect silence.

As for myself, I believed we who were thus chosen would perish in whatsoever of danger there was before us. It would be a glorious ending of one's life, yet as I reflected upon it without the slightest desire that I might have been among those who were to remain, I said to myself that it would be sweet to live until we had thrown off the king's yoke. At this moment when we sat face to face with death, almost feeling the chill breath from the great white angel's wings, I was certain our people would finally win the victory however many hirelings his Majesty might send upon us, as I was certain that my life might, within a very few moments, be the cost of this adventure.

Then we were told off into two squads of twenty each, and after this had been done General Marion said, in a voice which I fancied he had difficulty in holding firm:

"While the two squads are acting together Master Sawyer is to be in command. When you separate, he is to lead one division, and my brother the other. In selecting a lad to lead men I know full well you may raise, and with good reason, the charge of favoritism, but when I am sending into most dangerous service the only person left in this

world whose blood is the same as mine, then do I believe you readily accord me the poor satisfaction."

He waited a moment as if to learn whether there were any who questioned the wisdom of his decision, and as no one spoke he turned toward us who were going, saying firmly, as if having done with personal feelings:

"The plan of attack is this: You forty men will set off at once for Georgetown, advancing with every care lest you betray to the enemy your movements. Once having come as near the post as may be with safety and secrecy, you will divide, one passing to the right and the other to the left, until having gained positions nearly opposite on either side of the camp. If while executing this manœuvre you find that there has been any material change in the post, such as reinforcements, or the throwing up of breastworks, messengers are to be sent back to the main body at once. Failing in that, you are to remain in hiding until hearing a single shot from the direction of this road, when, without an instant's delay, you will charge into the camp, beginning the attack. It is my intention to offer you as a sacrifice, if so be one is needed, to the end that you shall keep the enemy employed until the regiment may fall upon him at his weakest point."

Having said this the general turned away, Captain Horry following; but those who formed the hollow square stood in position, gazing at us as if hoping at the last moment one or more might grow

weak-kneed, thus giving opportunity for some of them.

"It goes without saying that we are to advance on foot," Master Sawyer said, addressing us of the two squads who were drawn up in line. "We are to make our way around the camp over swampy land, and surely some of us have had sufficient experience in trying to get horses across such ground without needing more, therefore, because the advance must be slow, I propose that we set off without further delay."

We waited only long enough to get all our equipments, and while we lads were doing this the remainder of the Minute Boys crowded around as if to bid us good-by, but we would have none of it.

"Words of parting at such a time are not seemly in the mouths of soldiers," Gabriel said, as, his preparations completed, he strode away to where the volunteers were already standing in line, and we followed him, I for one thankful because he had shut off the leave-taking.

Proud and eager though I was, it would not have required much just then to weaken me, and if, peradventure, I was going away from these comrades for the last time, I desired they should remember me as one who went forth to duty with a brave heart.

I believe the commander must have given certain orders to those who remained, for when we formed in line the other portion of the "ragged regiment" was at the opposite side of the encamp-

ment busied with various duties as if they had no part in, or heed to what we were doing.

We set off in double file, Master Sawyer leading the way, and because of the possibility that we might betray our whereabouts, word was passed that no man speak during the march.

We went at our best pace, and in little more than half an hour were come to where we could see the settlement of Georgetown, with the canvas tents standing so thickly among the buildings that it looked like a veritable city.

Thus far we had met no person, for the night was well advanced, and when the squads were divided while we stood within the shelter of the trees just off the main road, Master Sawyer said to Gabriel in a whisper:

"So far as I know there is no choice between the two positions, lad; but if you have any, say the word, otherwise we will move as we are standing — you to the right and I to the left."

"Whatever suits you, sir," Gabriel replied, and motioning to his squad, Master Sawyer moved off swiftly, so silently that we who remained would not have been aware they had left us but for the passing blotches against the lighter sky, which told of their march.

Gabriel did not linger after the others had gone, and well was it for me, because at such a time, when we had been warned plainly of the dangers to be encountered, delay would have soon made me timorous.

CHAPTER XIX

A DASTARDLY BLOW

Now that the task which I set myself is well-nigh done, and I am come to the point of relating that which has caused me more sorrow than I can ever know again, I am at a loss how to go about it.

Inclination prompts me to hasten over the sad story for my own relief, and yet the memory of that lad, which will ever live green in my heart, demands that I do whatsoever I may, to the end that others may know how one devoted friend to the Cause was sent into the Beyond by the most dastardly blow ever dealt.

To begin at the moment when Gabriel led us around the encampment: The way was difficult; owing to the darkness we could not choose our path, but must flounder on as best we might, clinging to the branches of trees here and there, forcing a way through thickets that we might find a firmer foothold upon the roots of the bushes, and although we could have had less than half a mile to advance, I believe we spent nearly two hours in the task, because to the necessity of moving as silently as possible, was added the roughness of the way.

Then we came, as nearly as could be judged, to the point spoken of by General Marion. We were

at the very edge of the swamp, within less than three hundred yards of a blockhouse where it might well be supposed a large number of Britishers would be found.

"Why should we not move two hundred paces farther on?" some one asked. "Before we could make any showing whatsoever from here, those in yonder blockhouse would be able to shoot us down to the last man."

"It is here, as I believe, that General Marion intended we should go in," Gabriel replied, "and because we are opposite the blockhouse will it be possible for us to attract the attention of the greatest number of the enemy, which is all we have been sent to do."

After that no one made objections to our station. It was seemingly the place where death would come quickly, and that was evidently what had been intended for us.

After thus taking station there was nothing to do save await the signal, and we assembled on the firm ground within shelter of the foliage, every fellow gripping his musket tightly, I fancied, even as I did mine.

As the minutes wore away we began to believe that we had gotten into position sooner than the commander had anticipated, and I sorrowed because of such fact. To charge the camp, to feel the intoxication born of powder fumes, to struggle desperately to best the enemy and fall while so doing, was far easier than standing there idle with

ample time in which to think of what must be the end.

Perhaps some such idea was in Gabriel's mind, for after a time he said, speaking in a low tone as he laid his hand affectionately on my shoulder:

"Perhaps it will never again be our good fortune to have such an opportunity of proving our metal as is given this night. Now I am in no wise eager for death, but in my mind there is little fear that the end be near at hand. Even if the odds are so strong against us, we shall take this post of Georgetown, as I firmly believe. My brother is a careful, prudent soldier, never taking upon himself a task which is without hope, although there are many times when it has seemed so to be. We shall capture Georgetown, lads, and if either of us fails to come out alive, we have the proud satisfaction of knowing that, whatsoever befalls the Cause, our names must live among those who gave up everything for freedom."

"Ay, lad, but this is not the time for such speeches," Archie Gordon said nervously, and had I not known the boy so well I might have believed he was afraid. "It is no proof that his courage is greatest who speaks very much regarding the future."

"Meaning by such speech that I had best hold my tongue?" Gabriel said with a laugh. "Perhaps you are right, yet there is upon me the inclination to speak of what we have ventured, in order that I may be the better able to appreciate

life after it has been offered as a sacrifice and refused."

"I guarantee once we are come out from this expedition you will not need anything of the past to make you understand that we ventured into the very shadow of death. I realize without being told that ours is as desperate an undertaking as a man can well imagine —"

"Now your words are more ill-timed than Gabriel's!" I interrupted, for between the two of them the cold chill of fear was beginning to run up and down my spine.

Gabriel, heedless of this interruption, continued to speak of the future as if we had no part in the present, and while he talked, even though his hand was still upon my shoulder, I ceased to hear, for my thoughts were gone out to that which lay directly before us.

I had never before advanced against an enemy on foot, and the fact of being without a horse gave me a sense of uneasiness. Certain it is that my courage did not fail me, even though I was growing timorous. My hand was trembling with excitement, and my mouth parched and dry as if I had been many hours without water.

Gabriel had just taken my hand in his as if realizing that I was giving no heed to what he said, when a single shot rang out, sounding in my ear as loud as a cannon, and it was as if the very air was aquiver with the reverberation when Gabriel cried:

"Now, lads, shoulder to shoulder, and remem-

ber that so long as we can keep on our feet to discharge a weapon, so much more of aid are we giving to those who depend upon us!"

For the instant I saw nothing, had difficulty in moving my feet, and then the pressure of Gabriel's shoulder on one side and Archie's on the other brought me to my senses, causing me to realize that if I failed ever so slightly in the task which was before us then was shame come upon all the Minute Boys of South Carolina.

But the enemy must have been on the alert — must have had some inkling that an attack was intended, for the report of the musket, which was our signal, seemed to be theirs also. Before we had taken twenty paces a mass of men began to pour out of the blockhouse like bees from a hive, and I heard one, most like an officer, cry sharply:

"Halt! Make ready!"

Before he could speak another word Gabriel cried:

"Fire, lads! Fire, and then drop to the ground!"

We got in our volley, and were lying at full length reloading our weapons, when the British bullets whistled over our backs.

Gabriel and I both succeeded in recharging our muskets and rising on one knee, before the redcoats were upon us with bayonets. It needed not the word of command to induce me to fire again, for in another instant that bristling line of steel would have been stopped only by our bodies.

I fired, as did a dozen or more of my comrades,

and that we took good aim even in the excitement could be told by the fact that the redcoats halted, and wavered for an instant as if on the verge of a panic. I dare venture to say that if there had been another squad of twenty immediately at our backs we might have driven those soldiers of the king's into their blockhouse again, thereby gaining just so much more time for our regiment, which, as we could hear by the report of the firing, had already begun the attack.

Again the Britishers came at us, and by this time the remainder of our party succeeded in getting their muskets ready.

Once more the enemy faltered, and we strove all in vain to reload before they could come upon us.

Then they closed in, and we struck aside their bayonets with the butts of our muskets, until it became a hand-to-hand struggle, each trying to preserve his own life and take that of his adversary.

A big fellow, trussed up with so much finery that he must perforce have found it difficult to move quickly, seemed to have singled me out, and in order to prevent him from running me through, I grappled him by the throat. We fell to the ground, I uppermost, as I strove to throttle him, using every effort to get my hands down beneath the leathern stock he wore, when I heard a cry which I fancied was uttered by Archie Gordon, and it came from the lips of one who was dying.

Dimly, as if in a dream, I realized that everything depended upon our prolonging the fight until

our people at the front could work their way well into the encampment, and clenched my teeth to repress a cry of pain when the fellow beneath me, having unfastened his bayonet, thrust it through my leg. I tried to put into my fingers all the strength of my body, believing that if I could kill this hireling of the king's at once I might have yet remaining sufficient life to grapple another, thus continuing the struggle so many seconds longer.

Whether I gave him his quietus, or he succeeded in slipping out from my grasp, I cannot say, but certain it is that after a time, not knowing what had been done, and realizing nothing whatsoever of that which was going on about me, I found myself confronting another man. At the same time I heard, as if from afar, the thundering of horses' hoofs, and mingled with the noise the words of Gabriel:

"We surrender! Throw down your arms, lads! There is no reason why we should sacrifice our lives uselessly."

I believe it was the word "surrender" from his lips which brought me to my senses, even as a douche of cold water brings the blood to the surface of the body, and on the instant I saw and understood all the situation.

The enemy must have believed we were the advance of a large force, for in addition to those whom we had seen come from out the blockhouse, a full hundred mounted men were riding toward us. Even though we had struggled on regardless

of life, no more than ten seconds would have remained for resistance.

Seeing this, I let my hands fall idly by my side, and stepped somewhat behind Gabriel, not, as God knows, with any idea that his body should shelter mine, but because he was the leader, and it was for him to speak. I also desired that those minions of the king who fancied two or three hundred all insufficient a force to cope with twenty men and boys, should see how young our leader was.

It was not Archie Gordon's death-cry I had heard, but some other, for on the instant Archie stood by my side, and from the tremor of his voice I knew how near his eyelids the tears were brought because we had not been able to do more, as he said:

"There are less than half of us yet alive, and I question, Rufus, whether we were wise to surrender."

"When Gabriel gave the command we had no choice, and what profits it we should have stood up a few seconds longer? The fight is well on, and we have done our part, not as we would have liked, but to the best of our strength."

There were only six of us out of the twenty left alive to surrender, when Gabriel gave the command, and in front of the little party I dare venture to say were no less than two hundred of the enemy. A gallant victory for them in good sooth, and a glorious victory for us, insomuch as we had held this number away, for however short a time,

from the path of those who followed General Marion.

While one might have counted twenty we stood there facing them in the gloom, which was rapidly decreasing because of the fires which sprung up here and there, showing that a certain number of the enemy had been told off to build them when an attack was made, and then from some one amid the throng, an officer, of course, came the word:

"Advance, you rebels, and show yourselves!"

Why we were put on parade at such a time, when it was for them a pitiful victory, mayhap thirty or forty to one, I could not fancy, but it behoved us as prisoners to obey, and so we did.

Gabriel strode forward proudly, as if he had litle heed what might be done with him, we following until having come within four or five paces of the man who had given the command, when suddenly there was a disturbance among those directly facing us, and then from out the mass of armed men came that sneaking, traitorous cur, Seth Hastings!

A cry of delight burst from his lips as he recognized Gabriel, and I, unable to hold my peace because of the anger which surged through my heart at sight of him, cried to the officer who had thus put his six prisoners on exhibition:

If the king must needs have such as that miserable Tory's aid before he can whip us of the Carolinas, do not put us to torture by allowing him here! We will take whatsoever of punishment you may inflict, save the sight of that sneak!"

It was even while I spoke, and for this shall I never cease to blame myself, because, had I not allowed the rage in my heart to overpower me, I might perchance have done something toward warding off that dastardly blow. It was, as I say, even while I spoke that the traitorous reptile seized a sabre from the hand of the man nearest him, and running swiftly forward while Gabriel's face was turned toward the officer, raised the blade, bringing it down on the dear lad's head with all his strength, cleaving the entire skull.

I quivered in impotent rage as I pushed wildly forward, seeing nothing, but having before my eyes that which was like unto drops of blood, and more than that of my own knowledge I cannot tell.

Archie Gordon has said that I fell upon that Tory villain before a finger could be raised to stay me, and without weapon, save only my naked hands, I sent his soul into that torment which I firmly believe is to be his forever more.

Nor could the Britishers make a move toward separating me from the lifeless body of him who had killed the bravest lad that ever lived among us, for at that moment our people made a charge straight through the encampment, and we who a moment before had been prisoners were left to our own devices.

I know nothing whatsoever of that which followed. Rage and grief had kindly deprived me of my senses, and I was spared the knowledge, for the time being, that our adventure, from which we

hoped so much, was come to naught within ten minutes after our dear lad's murder.

Even now, after we have seen a new nation spring into existence, having had a hand in the making of it — after we are enjoying the repose which follows a well-earned victory, my heart is too sore because of that dastardly blow struck by the cur, Seth Hastings, to permit of my setting down that which the Minute Boys did when Gabriel Marion was no longer with us.

Much against my will, the lads made me their leader, and before the struggle for independence was come to a glorious end, the company numbered a hundred strong. Therefore do I see another reason why I should leave to some one else the task of depicting what we did in aid of the Cause before the king was ready to sue for peace.

Hence it is that I shall copy down here the account of our movements in the Carolinas, after that day when Gabriel left us forever in this world, as it has been written by one whose trade it is to write the history of our country, only adding to his words the explanation that the Minute Boys of South Carolina remained under command of Francis Marion until the united Colonies were acknowledged as a free nation by all the rulers of the world:

"After his discomfiture at Georgetown, Marion retired to Snow's Island, where he fixed his camp and secured it by such works of art as the absence

of natural defences required. Because of the murder of the general's brother, the battle cry of the ragged regiment ever was, 'No quarter for Tories!'

"From Snow's Island Marion sent out his scouts in every direction, and there he planned some of his boldest expeditions. Reinforcements came, and at the close of 1780, Marion was strong enough to confront any British detachments then abroad from headquarters.

"While Greene's army was approaching the Pedee early in 1781, Marion was very active abroad from his camp, at which he always left a sufficient garrison for its defence. Here and there he was smiting detachments of the British army, and when Lee, who had been sent by Greene to join him with a part of his legion, sought for Marion, it was with great difficulty he could be found, for his rapid marshes were in the midst of vast swamps. As soon as the junction was consummated, these brave partisans planned an expedition against the British post at Georgetown, . . . nothing was effected beyond the capture of the commandant and a few privates, and slaying some stragglers, yet the enterprise was not fruitless of good to the patriot Cause.

"After resting a few hours, Marion and Lee moved rapidly up the north bank of the Santee, toward Nelson's Ferry, to surprise Colonel Watson, who had taken post there. That officer, informed of his approach, . . . hastened on toward Camden. At this time Greene was commencing his

famous retreat, and summoned Lee with his whole legion to meet him at Guilford.

"The departure of Lee greatly weakened Marion's force. Yet he was not less active than before, and his enterprises were generally more important and successful. He sent out small detachments of Minute Boys — lads of the Carolinas — to beat up Tory camps and recruiting stations, wherever they might be found. . . .

"Toward the last of January (1781), we find the blacksmith of Kingstree forging saws into rough broadswords for a corps of cavalry which Marion placed in command of Colonel Peter Horry. In February, Horry is observed eastward of the Pedee battling with Tories and British regulars. . . . Everywhere was the name of Marion feared, and the presence of his men was dreaded by the opponents of the patriot Cause.

"In the spring of 1781 Colonel Watson was sent with a select corps of five hundred men to attempt the destruction of Marion's brigade. The advanced guards of Marion, under Colonel Horry, met the advance of the enemy, and the patriots were obliged to fall back in the direction of Williamsburg. . . . For ten days the British force remained stationary, continually annoyed by Marion, until the commander was obliged to choose between certain destruction in detail, or attempt boldly to fight his way to Georgetown. He decided upon the latter course, and at midnight he fled. Marion pursued, fell upon him at Sampit bridge, near Georgetown, and smote many of his wearied soldiers.

The British commander escaped to Georgetown with the remnant of his army, complaining that Marion would not 'fight like a gentleman or a Christian.'

"Sad intelligence now reached Marion. The Tory colonel, Doyle, had penetrated to his camp on Snow's Island, destroyed his provisions and stores, dispersed the little garrison, and then marched up Lynch's Creek. Marion pursued the marauder until he was informed that Doyle had destroyed all his heavy baggage, and had the advantage of a day's march on the road to Camden. Marion wheeled, and hastened, through the overflowed swamps, to confront Watson, who was again in motion with fresh troops, and had encamped upon Catfish Creek, near the present Marion Court-house. Our partisan encamped within five miles of him, and there he was joined by Lee. This junction alarmed Watson. He destroyed his heavy baggage, wheeled his field-pieces into Catfish Creek, and fled by a circuitous route toward Georgetown.

"In May, we find Marion hanging upon the rear of Lord Rawdon on his retreat from Nelson's Ferry toward Charleston, and from that time until the siege of Ninety-six, he was often with Sumter and Colonel Washington, watching the enemy's movements near the Santee and Edisto, and cutting off supplies and intelligence from Cruger.

"In June, Marion took possession of Georgetown, the garrison fleeing down Winyaw Bay after a slight resistance. He could not garrison it, so

he moved the stores up to his old encampment on Snow's Island. . . .

"Marion took the leading part in the discomfiture of Colonel Coates, at a loss to himself of seventy killed and wounded. Later he nearly wiped out Major Fraser's force of five hundred men, and would have completed the victory but for lack of ammunition. In this case the loss of the British was severe, while Marion was not bereft of a man. He took a glorious part in the battle of Eutaw, and then retired to the recesses of a cane-brake on Santee River Swamp to await further opportunity.

"From this time until the evacuation of Charleston Marion's brigade confined their operations to the vicinity of Charleston. Elected to a seat in the Assembly at Jacksonborough, Marion left the brigade in command of Colonel Horry. Previous to his departure he had a severe skirmish near Monk's Corner, with three hundred regulars and Tories, who came up from Charleston to surprise him. He repulsed them, but soon afterward, while he was absent, a larger force under Colonel Thompson attacked his brigade near the Santee. Fortunately he arrived during the engagement, but not in time to prevent the defeat and partial dispersion of his beloved troops. The remnant of his brigade rallied around him, and he retired beyond the Santee to recruit and reorganize.

"Early in April, 1782, Marion attacked a force of more than five hundred Tories under Major Gainey, and whipped them so thoroughly that

Gainey, thoroughly humbled, joined the patriot force. From that time until Charleston was evacuated (December 14, 1782), the Swamp Fox continued on the aggressive, making his name, and that of his followers, particularly the Minute Boys, now grown to a brigade of more than three hundred, feared by Britisher and Tory alike."

THE END.

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